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READER No. 11

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also stories by

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**Ray Bradbury**

**T. S. Stribling**

AND OTHERS



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—D.A.W.

**AVON**  
**FANTASY READER**

**No. 11**

Edited by  
**DONALD A. WOLLHEIM**

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*Stories by*

<b>NELSON BOND</b>	•	<b>SEABURY QUINN</b>
<b>T. S. STRIBLING</b>	•	<b>FRANK OWEN</b>
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# Glamour

by Seabury Quinn

*Let us be honest about it, is not love something of a witchcraft? And has not each sex its own particular brand of witchery, so that man and woman may join hands in marriage and be contented with each other even though the outside world, the world beyond the boundaries of the tight band of love mirage, sees them as without exceptionalism, without glamour? This is basically the theme of Seabury Quinn's strange tale of a witch in modern days, a witch whose charms are no less potent than those of her fearsome ancestors of Colonial days and yet whose spell is perhaps more to be desired than feared.*



THE WIND tramped round and round the fieldstone walls of the clubhouse, muttering and moaning; seemingly it maundered threats and wailed pleas alternately. Rain sweated on the recessed windows, glazing them with black opacity until the mullioned panes gave back distorted mirrorings of the gunroom, vague and indistinct as oil paintings smeared with a rag before they had a chance to dry. In the eight-foot fireplace beech and pine logs piled in alternating layers upon the hammered iron firedogs blazed a roaring holocaust and washed the freestone floor and adz-cut oaken beams of the ceiling with ruddy light. From the radio a bass voice bellowed lustily:

"Then all of my days I'll sing the praise of brown October ale . . ."

Harrigan felt like a cat in a strange alley. Newly come to Washington as a member of the scientific staff of the Good Roads Bureau, he had permitted himself to be talked into joining the Izaak Walton Gun and Rod Club, being assured he would find some kindred spirits there. "None o' your dam' lily-fingered pen-pushers an' desk-hoppers there," Jack Bellamy had told him. "They're men like you an' me, son. Two-fisted, hairy-chested sportsmen, capable o' handlin' liquor or an argument like gentlemen. Lawyers, bankers, doctors, scientists; not a Gov'ment clerk in a carload of 'em."

Used to outdoor life and with some experience with both rod and gun, Harrigan had risen eagerly to the bait, but already he began to have his doubts. The station wagon from the club had met him at Vienna Junction, depositing him on the clubhouse porch a little after five. Bellamy, whom he had expected to meet him, had not shown up; there was no one there he knew, and the members gathered in small cliques at dinner and in the gunroom afterward. No one but the white-jacketed colored waiter seemed

aware of his existence, and he only when an upraised finger signaled orders for a fresh mug of old musty.

"New feller here?" The booming challenge at his elbow startled him. "Didn't remember seein' you before. My name's Crumpacker, Judge Lucius Q. Crumpacker. What's yours? Mind if I sit by you?"

The big man dropped into the vacant hickory chair between Harrigan and the fire-warmed hearth and beckoned to the waiter. "Double Scotch and soda, Jake," he ordered. "You know my brand—and no ice, remember. When I want ice-water with a little whisky in it I'll tell you."

He lit a cigar which seemed almost half a yard in length, blew a series of quick, angry smoke rings like the pompoms of exploding shrapnel, and turned again to Harrigan, bushy eyebrows working up and down like agitated caterpillars.

"Had a dev'lish mean experience this evenin'," he confided in a voice that sounded somehow like an angry mastiff's growl. "Ordered off an old hag's land. 'Pon my word, I was. We ought to run the old hadrian out o' the county. She has no business here, ought to be in the poorhouse, or jail. Devilish old virago." He worried at the end of his cigar until it flattened and unraveled like a frayed-out rope, then flung the ruin in the fire and lit another stogie. "Umph. Land wasn't posted, either."

"But I thought all that was taken care of," ventured Harrigan as the silence lengthened. "I was told the club had made arrangements with the local land owners to let us shoot on their land for a stipulated yearly fee and a guarantee to reimburse them for any damages they might sustain."

"Right. Quite right. There is such an arrangement, and by its terms the yokels have a right to post their land whenever they get tired of takin' money from us, but that old scold down by Gunpowder Creek refuses either to post her land or sign a contract with us. She's got nothing but a weed-patch and a flock o' moulтин' hens. You could ride a regiment o' cavalry across her place, and all you'd trample would be goldenrod and ragweed, but the old she-devil won't let one of us set foot across her line. She's the last one of a family that settled here in 1635, and though there's nothing but the cellar and chimneys of the old mansion left she still puts on the high and mighty air with us and treats us like a lot o' trespassers and interlopers."

"Her place adjoins the Spellman farm. Spellman's glad enough to collect from us for the shootin'-rights, I'd flushed up a covey his side of the line. Must have been a dozen birds in it. I knocked down four of 'em and saw 'em take covert in the next field. That would be her briar-patch."

"Maybe I had no business trespassin', for after all we've no agreement with her, but she'd not posted signs, either. So Xerxes—that's my wire-haired setter—and I just kept on goin'. We'd walked two-three hundred yards across her mangy patch o' crab-grass when Xerxes started actin' queerly. First he'd run around in circles, as if he had the scent o' something; then he'd come lopin' back to me with his tail down, and look up in my face with that peculiar questionin' way dogs have, and when I'd tell him to go smell 'em out he'd run off for a little distance, then start circlin' back again."

"Then he did a thing no well-trained bird dog ever does, gave tongue and rushed at something. Sir, you could have knocked me over with a stalk o' rye-straw. There he was, the best bird dog in seven counties, actin' like a damned coon dog. I followed him and found him belly-down before a patch o' briar bushes, barkin' and whinin' and growlin', as if he didn't quite know whether he was more frightened or angry.

"I poked my gun into the bushes, for I thought perhaps he'd run a skunk to cover, though usually a polecat won't give ground for man or devil. Well, sir, what d'ye think I saw?" He paused rhetorically and drew a deep draft from the bubbling amber liquid in his glass; then, as Harrigan raised politely questioning brows:

"A cat, sir. A dam' old mangy green-eyed tabby-cat crouchin' in the heart o' those blackberry vines and lookin' poisoned darts and daggers at my dog. I hate cats like the Devil hates Scriptures—thievin', slinkin', skulkin' bird-killers! So I pushed the vines away still farther and bent down to get a better aim at it. I was goin' to let the beast have both barrels, but—believe it or doubt me, sir, it faded out o' sight!"

"Cats are wonderfully agile," Harrigan agreed as Judge Crumpacker looked at him, obviously awaiting comment.

"This one wasn't," Crumpacker exploded. "This beast didn't slink away. It vanished. One second it was there, lookin' at us like a basilisk, and next moment there was nothin' there, but——"

Again he paused to take refreshment from his now half-empty glass, and: "But just as that dam' feline disappeared we heard a rustlin' in the patch o' briars to our left, and there, lookin' twice as poisonous as any cat, was old Lucinda Lafferty."

"Lucinda Lafferty?" echoed Harrigan. "You mean——"

"Precisely, sir. She's the old hag who owns that patch o' worthless land. I don't believe that she has half a dozen teeth in both her jaws, but she was fairly grindin' those she had when we turned round and saw her, and if her eyes weren't flashin' fire I never saw the light o' hell in human optics. And I've been on the bench for thirty years, passin' sentence on the most desperate criminals ever brought to justice."

"So she threatened you with suit for trespass?"

"Not she. She knew she'd never have a chance before a court or jury in this county. The country folk don't bear with *her* kind round here. She cursed me."

"She swore at you?"

Judge Crumpacker was stout, gray-haired and ruddy-faced. In his red-suede waistcoat and tan flannel shirt, with corduroy trousers thrust into high-topped boots, he looked the perfect picture of a Georgian innkeeper from a Jeffery Farnol novel, or, perhaps, a Regency three-bottle man. Harrigan had a momentary, slightly comic mental picture of a slattern farm-shrew pouring billingsgate upon him. But the other's answer swept the vision away.

"I said exactly what I meant, She cursed me. Aimed a skinny finger at me and called down maledictions on my head. It may be that her lack of

teeth prevented her articulatin' clearly, but it seemed as if she interjected words in heathen gibberish between the English as she cursed me.

"Xerxes was absolutely terrified. I've had that dog for five years, raised and trained him from a pup, and I never saw him lower his tail for anything before, not even when he ran across a rattlesnake or bobcat, but today his spirit seemed to fail him utterly, and he whined and put his tail between his legs and shrank against me like a mongrel cur. I tell you, sir, it almost made me believe what they say about that devilish old hadrian—the way she looked at us, the threats she made, the uncouth jargon that she spewed at us—Jake!" He crooked his finger to the attendant. "Another of the same, and see you put some whisky in it this time. What say? What do they say about her?" he turned back to Harrigan. "Why, damme, sir, they say that she's a witch!"

Harrigan had difficulty keeping a straight face. Abetted by the potent Scotch, galled by the memory of his wounded *amour-propre*, the dignified old gentleman was working himself into a towering passion. "A witch?" Harrigan repeated. "How's that, sir?"

"A witch," Judge Crumpacker reiterated. "Precisely, sir; a witch. Judge Petterson dismissed a case against her only last term of court when a neighbor sued her on a charge of malicious mischief, alleging that she'd caused his pigs to die by overlooking them. The pigs were dead, there was no doubt about that. Apparently a herd of forty fine swine were dead of poison, but the veterinary who examined them could find no trace of any known hogbane, and they couldn't prove that old Lucinda had access to the pens. Indeed, the testimony was that she had never been upon her neighbor's land, but merely stood out in the road before his house and called a ban down on the swine for rooting in her garden several days before. There's no doubt about her malice, but the statutes of this state ignore the possibility of witchcraft, so she had to be discharged. There's not a Negro in the county who will pass her place at night, and most of the white folks prefer going around the other way after dark. If she'd lived two hundred years ago she'd have been hanged long before this, or sold as a slave in Barbados or Jamaica."

Absent-mindedly he reached for his glass, found none, and raised a querulous complaint:

"Jake, confound you, where's my drink?"

"Scuse me, Jedge y'honor, suh," the servitor appeared around the corner of the bar, his face a study in embarrassment and latent fear, "Ah didn't mean ter be slow erbout fetchin' yuh yo' licker, but Joseph jest now called me to de kennels, suh, an' tole me ter tell yuh—what Ah means, suh, is——"

"Yes?" The red in Judge Crumpacker's ruddy cheeks grew almost magenta. "What the devil are you drivin' at?"

"Jedge, y'honor, suh, hit's erbout yo' dawg, suh, please; he's done gone an'——"

"What's he done? I saw him locked up in the kennel myself, and saw that he had food and water. He's not hungry, and he never goes out forag-



ing. Don't tell me that he's gotten loose and stolen something from the kitchen——"

"Oh, no, suh. He ain't stole nothin', Jedge y'honor, suh. He's daid!"

"What?" The question snapped as sharply as a whip. "How?"

"Pizened, Jedge y'honor, suh." The Negro swallowed hard and nodded solemnly. His eyes appeared to be all whites. "Ah heerd as how yuh an' him wuz on ole Mis' Lucindy's place this evenin'——"

"Come on—out o' my way!" the judge burst in, and, Harrigan and Jake behind him, stamped out to the long shed behind the clubhouse where members' dogs were quartered.

Jake had not been guilty of an overstatement. The pointer, a big, rangy dog, lay on its side, legs stiff, lips curled back and foam-flecked, eyes bulging almost from their sockets. Its sides and stomach were distended till the skin was stretched like drum-parchment about them.

"I left him less than half an hour ago," Crumpacker almost sobbed. "He was well and healthy then, just finishing his dinner. Poor old Xerxes—poor old pal!"

"He might have picked up something in the fields this afternoon," soothed Harrigan. "Dogs often——"

"Not this one, sir," Crumpacker thundered. "I've had my eye on him all day. He's eaten nothing but the food I gave him, and I brought that up with me—*ba!*"

"What is it, sir?" asked Harrigan, but even as he asked he knew the answer. There was a feeling of malaise about him, a sort of prickling of the short hairs on his neck, and a chilly, eery feeling, as of horripilation, on his forearms.

"That infernal old Lucinda Lafferty—that devilish old witch. This is her doing! She killed my poor dog just as she killed her neighbor's swine, by witchcraft. She got away with it that time; Petterson dismissed the case against her, but this time she has me to deal with. I'll track her down and brand her for the foul sorceress she is or die in the attempt. By Gad, I will sir!"

It might have been a foraging crow disturbed in his foray in the clubhouse kitchen yard, or routed by their voices from the shelter he had taken in the kennel shed. Whatever it was, there came a sudden flapping of strong wings against the shadows, and a hoarse, derisive croak of laughter as something took flight from the overhanging roof into the soot-black darkness of the rain-drenched night.

Morning came with bright, cool air and sunlight sparkling on wet trees and grass. Harrigan was among the first at breakfast, but early as he was he found Judge Crumpacker finishing his ham and eggs as he came in the breakfast room. Apparently the judge had not had a good night, for his face was lined and puffy and there was a sort of gray, unhealthy pallor underneath his ruddiness. The contrast reminded Harrigan of rouge smeared on a corpse. The old man's eyes were swollen, too. If he had been a woman Harrigan would have thought he had been crying.

"Mornin'," rumbled Crumpacker, nodding as he looked up from his

plate. "Ready to go with me?" He filled a tumbler a third full of whisky from the bottle at his elbow, and drained it at a gulp. "I want somebody with me when I have a showdown with that old hag." His hand was just a thought unsteady as he replenished his glass. Some of the whisky slopped across the rim and settled in a little puddle on the polished table.

Harrigan was on the point of refusing. He had come up here to shoot, not listen to the maunderings of a bibulous old gaffer. Then, abruptly, "Yes, sir, of course," he returned. The choleric old judge had worked himself into a state of sustained, choking anger, he was roweled by a spur of rage and hate, and in the last three minutes he had drunk enough neat liquor to fuddle anyone. It would be inviting murder to permit him to accost a poor old woman by himself in this condition.

They walked along the surfaced road until they reached the Spellman farm, then cut across a wide brown field set with long rows of corn-shocks like the tepees of an Indian encampment, and jeweled with plump golden pumpkins.

"Ought to be some rabbits here," the judge remarked. "Little devils like to hang around the shocks—here, Xerxes, smell 'em out, boy—oh!" The exclamation was almost a wail, the mourning of a man for his old hunting comrade, and the look that followed it was grim and hard and merciless as a bared knife.

The rail fence separating Spellman's farm from the next land was ruinous, overgrown with creepers, fallen almost away in some places. The field beyond was a fitting complement. Turf which had not felt a plow in twenty years gave way to bramble patches, and these in turn were choked by rank growths of ragweed, goldenrod and burdock. Devil's-pitchfork bushes grew waist high, and the barbed seed-stalks clung to their trousers like a swarm of parasites as they pushed through them.

Beyond the orchard lot of gnarled and dying apple trees they found the owner's shack, a single-story, two-room structure of unpainted clapboards stained a leprous gray by long exposure to the weather. The door sagged drunkenly on rusted, broken hinges; several of the window-lights were broken and the holes were stuffed with wadded burlap sacking. The two planks of the stoop were warped until their edges curled up like old boot-soles, and water from the rain of last night gathered in their concavities. The kitchen yard was littered with tin cans, discarded, broken pots and dishes, scraps of rag, a rotting mattress and a broken, rust-eaten bed spring. Stark as a skeleton of the dead past, two ivy-smothered, moss-grown chimneys reared their broken tops from crumbling foundations and a cellar overgrown with sumac, all that remained of the once-noble mansion whither Washington and Jefferson had come as guests and General Lee and Stonewall Jackson had been entertained. Fire, neglect and ruthless time had laid it in the dust as low as Nineveh and Tyre. The bloodless hand of utter, abject poverty lay on everything, and yet there was a brooding, threatening quality of silence there. Almost, it seemed to Harrigan, the place was waiting. . . . What it waited for he had no idea, but that it was something violent, tragic and abrupt he was sure.

Crumpacker strode through the rubble littering the yard and beat upon the weather-blasted door with his gun-butt. The rotting panels sagged and shivered at the impact, and a hollow, vibrant booming echoed through the empty shack. Otherwise there was no answer.

"By Gad, I'll stand here hammerin' till the old crone comes, or knock her devilish door in!" Crumpacker declared, but Harrigan broke in with a relieved laugh.

"No use, Judge; can't you see the door's closed with a hasp and padlock, and the lock's been fastened on the outside? Whoever lives here has gone out and locked the door behind—good Lord!"

Around the rusted, tangled wire of the hen-coop had come a great dog, almost large as a mastiff, but heavy-furred, like a collie or shepherd. Obviously, half a dozen breeds or more combined to make its lineage; just as obviously it combined the worst features of each. Mange had eaten at its pelt until it showed bald patches of blue hide between the matted, flea-infested hair; its tail was stubby as a terrier's; its paws were disproportionately large and armed with long, cruel, curving claws which might almost have been a bear's; its eyes were small and deeply pitted in its wide face, rheumy with distemper, and its mouth combined the wideness of the bulldog's with the heavy-toothed long jaw of the Alaskan husky. It made no sound, but stood there snarling silently, black lips curled back in a ferocious grin, long, yellowed fangs exposed, and a look of absolutely devilish malevolence in its sunken eyes.

"Ha?" Crumpacker turned at Harrigan's ejaculation. "Hers, of course. Like mistress like dog, eh what?" He brought his gun up slowly, cradling the barrels in the crook of his left arm as he snapped back the hammers with his right thumb. "Maybe she loves the lousy beast. I hope so. Let's see how she'll like seein' it dead——"

The brute glared at him balefully, and showed no sign of fear as he raised the gun to take deliberate aim, but Harrigan jumped forward. "No, Judge, no!" he shouted. "Your quarrel is with her, not with this poor brute. It hadn't anything to do with Xerxes' death——"

Crumpacker's jaw set truculently. For the first time Harrigan saw all the latent, vengeful cruelty which the usually jovial ruddy countenance concealed. These were the features of a "hanging judge," a man who found a grim pleasure in sentencing other men to die.

"Her quarrel was with me, not my dog," he answered harshly. "I'm goin' to blow that ugly beast to hell. Stand aside, sir."

The roar of both barrels discharged in quick succession was like the belch of a field gun, and Harrigan fell stumbling back, shocked, blinded, all but deafened by the blaze of fire and detonation of the discharge, but in the instant Judge Crumpacker fired he had thrust his hand out, driving up the shotgun muzzle and sending the charge through the overhanging branches of a sassafras tree. As the shot went whistling and crashing through the brilliant red and green leaves, the big dog turned and trotted around the corner of the house, moving, for all its size, with cat-like quietness.

Crumpacker glared at Harrigan. Bitter, rageful hatred smoldered in his

eyes, making the brown pupils glow like tarnished garnets. "Damme, sir, men have been shot for less impertinence!" he burst out. Then, seeming to cool as suddenly as he had blazed, "Never mind; perhaps you're right, lad. My quarrel's with the old woman, not her dog. I reckon anger made me childish for a moment." He shook his heavy shoulders in disgust. "Come on, let's leave this filthy hole."

They recrossed Spellman's well-kept land and came out on the highroad just as a small roadster swung around the bend.

"Good morning, Judge; good morning, sir," the driver called as he brought his car to a halt. "Give you a lift back to the club?"

"Yes, thank you, we'd appreciate it, Doctor," Crumpacker answered as he introduced Harrigan.

Dr. Clancy was a man in early middle life, somewhere between forty-five and fifty, Harrigan surmised, smooth-skinned, clean-shaven, with a youthfulness and vigor which denied the nests of little wrinkles at the corners of his eyes and the streak of white that ran with startling contrast through his smoothly brushed black hair. His eyes were blue and kind and very knowing—"true Irish eyes" thought Harrigan—but there was an indefinable something about him which was puzzling. Men without women—priests, explorers, sailors, some soldiers—bear the mark of their denial stamped on them. Dr. Clancy seemed to have it. He would have seemed more properly attired in a Roman collar and black cassock vest, rather than the corduroys and flannel shirt he wore. The little satchel on the seat beside him seemed more like a small suitcase than a medicine kit, too, but . . .

He broke his idle speculations off, for Judge Crumpacker had been pouring out the story of his grievances to Dr. Clancy, not omitting his suspicions of witchcraft, and Dr. Clancy was not laughing. "Because the law does not admit a thing is no reason for denying its existence," he was saying. "Lee DeForest was threatened with prosecution for fraud when he introduced the ionic current detector for radio, and there are many people who remember when the Patent Office refused to consider applications for heavier-than-air flying-machines, just as it rejects claims for perpetual motion devices today. The Lafferty family's history is not good. The founder of the local branch was prosecuted twice for cruelty to his Negroes, and finally deported from the colony on a charge of trafficking with Satan. An ancestress of theirs was burned as a witch in England in the reign of James I. Miss Lucinda was a noted beauty in her day, but though she had three romances none of them was ever consummated. All three engagements were broken, and all three lovers died shortly after their estrangement—each in exactly the manner she had foretold."

Harrigan laughed. "You think that she's a witch, too? Perhaps the cat the Judge saw yesterday was really Miss Lucinda—" The seriousness of the other's face halted him.

"The Lord forbid that I make any accusations of that kind lightly," Dr. Clancy answered, "but if we admit for the sake of argument that she has the power of witchcraft she might have been the cat, or even the strange mongrel that you saw today."

"Lycanthropy?" laughed Harrigan incredulously. "You mean you really think that there are people who can change to bestial form at will—in the Twentieth Century?"

Dr. Clancy drew his brows down in a thoughtful frown. "No, I wouldn't quite say that," he returned. "It might be due to what the mediæval churchmen called glamour, the power to mislead the beholder. The line between witchcraft and magic, and that between magic and the prestidigitator's mumbo-jumbo, is far from sharply drawn. Every mythology tells of fairy gifts—chests of jewels or money which the recipient gloats over at night, and finds nothing but withered leaves or worthless stones next morning. That's silly, childish superstition, you say. Perhaps. But what about the Indian jugglers' rope trick? Hundreds of credible witnesses testify to having seen a rope thrown up into the air and apparently hanging there on nothing, but so securely fastened that a man could climb it. Yet on one or two occasions when motion pictures have been surreptitiously taken of the trick, the films showed nothing happening——"

"I get it," Harrigan broke in. "Fakery. Mass, or at least multiple, hypnotism."

Dr. Clancy nodded assent. "Whichever you prefer to call it. Magic, mesmerism, hypnotism. Terminology varies with the times, but facts remain the same. These things were understood in the East long before Mesmer introduced his theory of animal magnetism. Probably much longer than we suspect in the West, too. However, that's unimportant, really. The fact is that if it's possible for a Hindoo fakir to make people think they see a rope suspended from infinity it's quite as possible for someone in the West to make a person think he's looking at a cat when none is there, or at a dog when he is really looking at a woman. You know how Sir Walter Scott puts it:

"'It had much of glamour might  
To make a lady seem a knight.'

"Glamour—or hypnotism, if you prefer a modern scientific term—might quite as easily make an ugly old woman appear to be a dog or cat."

"But d'ye think Judge Crumpacker's dog could have been hypnotized into thinking that he saw a witch-cat?" Harrigan persisted.

"Or made to die, apparently from poison, through the power of suggestion?" added Crumpacker.

"I don't *think* anything," responded Dr. Clancy. "I'm only guessing, and taking the most charitable view. I'd rather think that old Lucinda Lafferty possesses hypnotic power and uses it to gratify her malice—for she is a malicious, vindictive old woman, according to all accounts—than believe she's entered into a pact with the Devil and signed away her soul."

He brought the car to a stop by the clubhouse porch in a long skid and leaped out with his little satchel.

"See you in a little while," he called across his shoulder. "Give me time to take a shower and get some breakfast."

The western sky was burnished rose-gold and blush-pink, smoke rose in

tall straight geysers from the chimneys, and the windows of the sparsely scattered houses reflected the last rays of sunset. Blue haze hung in the valleys, softening the burning reds and golds of autumn leaves, but on the rounded backs of the mountains the trees were blatant, flaunting flame-hued oranges and garnets.

Harrigan drew a deep lungful of the limpid evening air, glanced at his wristwatch, and set out along the highway toward the clubhouse. His afternoon had been successful. He had managed to avoid Judge Crumpacker and, on his own, had ranged the fields clear to the river, bagging four fat rabbits and half a dozen quail. Now he was pleasantly tired, wolf-hungry and completely lost. How far he'd come he had no accurate idea; he knew only vaguely which direction to take for the club. The soft blue dusk of evening crept across the sky, the moon showed a thin crescent, and a few bright stars began to twinkle.

"The Lafferty farm must be about here," he told himself as he trudged past a hedge of clipped hornbeam. "Too bad it's posted. I could cut across the meadow to the Spellman place and—hullo?" He started with an exclamation of dismay as a great raindrop struck him in the face.

He glanced up wonderingly at the sky. Five minutes earlier it had been dead calm and crystal clear, but now it was black as an inverted kettle, and the rain fell with a frantic fury, while a sudden wind whined like an animal in pain. He bent his head against the buffeting blast and stinging drops, turned up the collar of his shooting-coat and plodded on. "If I can make the Spellman place before I'm soaked through," he began, then, in spite of his discomfort, stopped stock-still in amazement. Through the waving branches of the birch-tree hedge a light shone with a steady invitation.

"It can't be old Miss Lucinda's shack," he reasoned. "That lies too low to be seen from the road. H'm; seems to me that would be just about the point the ruined mansion stands, but—pshaw! I'm confused by the storm. I've never been this far along the highway. Of course, there's a house there."

He swung along the surfaced roadway, found a gate pierced in the hedge and started up the avenue of honey locusts, chuckling at his luck. "Eddie, my boy, don't look a gift-house in the door," he advised. "If the Devil offers shelter on a night like this you'd better thank him kindly and accept it. Perhaps there isn't really any Devil. It's a dead sure thing pneumonia's no myth."

The house was larger than he'd thought, and older. Of red brick, built in Georgian style, it had tall windows, a deep, roofless porch with fluted white balustrade, and a cobweb fanlight above its wide front door. Through the transom shone a cheery glow of welcome, lamplight filtered through the curtained windows, mocking at the stormy blackness outside. This was no farmhouse, but the home of "quality" he realized as he drew the silver knocker back and struck a loud alarum on the door.

Shuffling footsteps sounded as he repeated his summons; the white-enamelled door swung back and an aged Negro smiled at him from amiable near-sighted eyes through the pebbles of a pair of gold-bowed spectacles. He wore a black dress coat with broad bright silver buttons, a tucked and frill-

edged linen shirt, and an antique black silk stock bound round his neck.

"Good evenin', suh," he greeted. "We's jes settin' down ter dinnah, an' Mis' Lafferty's supremely proud an' happy to receive yuh."

Harrigan started. This cordial greeting, as if he were expected . . . "Mis' Lafferty . . .?" A sudden gust of wind shattered the canopy of branches hanging by the porch and drove a chilling downpour on his neck. "Thank you," he answered, and stepped across the threshold.

Candles set in mirrored sconces stained the shadows of the wide hall with faint orange glows which faded out along the polished floor, but as he crossed the corridor behind the dusky major-domo, Harrigan had glimpses of old waxed mahogany, carpets from Shiraz and Hamadan, blurred portraits in deep gilded frames and the upward graceful sweep of a wide balustraded staircase.

She rose to greet him as he stepped into the dining-room, and as definitely as if he had been listening to its rhythm, he felt his heart skip a beat. Between them stretched the long polished mahogany table with its sparkling crystal and bright-gleaming silver under the soft light of candelabra, but the opulence of Georgian silver and the blurred mulberry tones of old china were forgotten as he saw her. Tall, slender, exquisite she was in a dinner dress of blue brocade lamé with silver shoulder straps, with lovely, slightly slanting, brooding eyes, and lips that slashed across the pearl-pale whiteness of her face like spilled fresh blood. Her hair was so pale that he could not tell if it were white or silver-blond, and she wore it swept up from the temples and the neck with waves of little curls massed high upon her head. A wide bracelet of white gold or platinum set with emeralds and rubies circled her left arm above the elbow; a string of matched pearls hung about her throat, and the creamy skin beneath was almost the exact color of the pearls.

"I—I'm sorry to intrude," he began huskily, unable to take his gaze from the vision outlined by the candle glow, "but I was overtaken by the storm, and——"

"Oh, I'm glad you came!" she interrupted with a soft, enticing laugh. "It's lonesome here, especially when it rains. You're from the club? Harrigan, I think Elijah said your name is? I'm Lucinda Lafferty."

He blinked at her in utter, stark amazement. "I beg your pardon, did I understand your name is——"

Her laugh, deep-pitched, a little husky, began in a soft chuckle that ended in a gay, infectious peal. "I know what you're thinking—that poor old woman down the road. Yes, we have the same name, and she's everlastingly receiving my mail. Only the other day she came here, almost burning up with rage, and threatened dreadful things—said she'd put a curse on me unless I either moved away or changed my name. She's really quite harmless, poor old creature, but they say she has an evil reputation. The country people, white as well as colored, firmly believe she's a witch. Imagine that in this century!"

Served by the velvet-footed old butler, they ate clear golden consommé spiced with a dash of lemon juice and Angostura bitters, bass fried to sad-

dle-brown in country butter, roast wild duck gamed to perfection and served with stewed green celery tops and mint-quince jelly, and spoon bread yellow as the sweet butter which melted on it.

Lucinda barely touched her glass, but Harrigan showed due appreciation for the vintage burgundy with which the butler kept his crystal goblet filled, and as he ate and drank his admiration for his hostess grew.

After dinner they sat in the drawing-room before the fire, and while she poured coffee from a Georgian silver pot in eggshell Sevres cups and brandy from a cobwebbed bottle into bubble-thin inhalers he looked at her as Abelard might first have looked at Héloïse or Aucassin at Nicolette.

She was a brilliant conversationalist, seeming to divine his thought before he put it into words, and following his verbal lead as a skilled dancer responds to her partner's lightest touch. She knew and loved the things he knew and loved—the bookstalls by the Seine, the pastry cooks' stands on the Ile de France, sunrise over the Grand Canyon, the flower market by St. Paul's in London, twilight on Fifth Avenue with lights beginning to appear in a soft veil of dusk.

But more than her quick sympathetic understanding and the wit and culture that her talk displayed, more than the beauty of her slim exquisite figure with its long and tapering arms and legs, flat back, firm, pointed breasts, and head set gracefully upon a round full throat; more, even, than the beauty of her exquisite pale-ivory face with its vivid scarlet mouth and long moss-agate eyes, he found her voice compelling. It was deep-pitched, velvety, with that peculiar throaty quality one sometimes hears in southern countries, and its husky, bell-like timbre seemed to strike vibrations from the very keynote of his being. When, discussing poetry, she took down a slim vellum volume and read from a Persian songster dead for a long thousand years:

"O my beloved,  
O thou pearl among women,  
If all other women in the world  
Were gathered in one corner of the East  
And thou alone in the dim West,  
I should surely come to thee,  
Even wert thou hidden  
In the deepest forest  
Or on the highest mountain top,  
O my beloved,"

he felt tears of something close akin to adoration welling in his eyes.

The storm had stopped and the silver boat of the moon's crescent rode a sky-turf tremulous with clouds when he left her. Her face was like jasmine blossom in the argent light as she bade him goodnight on the porch. "May I see you again soon, please?" he besought as she laid her rosy-tipped, small hand in his. "Tomorrow—in the morning?"

"Not in the morning, Edward"—they had come to first names already—she denied. "Tomorrow night, if there's a moon, you may come to me,



but I'm a different person in the day—I mean I like to lie abed till late," she added as he stared at her in bewilderment.

Acting on impulse, he raised her hand to his lips, and when she accepted the homage as if she had been used to it since infancy, he felt absurdly happy . . . grateful for her understanding acquiescence.

Rain dripped from the locust trees that hemmed the avenue which led down to the highway; great drops fell splashing from the wayside branches as he walked along the road, but before he'd gone a hundred yards he found himself treading in dust.

"Great Scott, I'll have to kick the door down to get in!" he exclaimed as he looked at his wrist-watch. "Half-past one. It didn't seem as if I'd been with Lucinda more than an hour." Suddenly he was hungry, famished. Despite the hearty dinner he had eaten he was as ravenous as though he'd tasted nothing since breakfast.

The clubhouse was ablaze with lights, and in the gunroom were gathered knots of members, talking in the hushed tones people use in church or at a funeral. "What's up?" he asked. "Somebody ill?"

"Not now," Dr. Clancy answered soberly. "It's Judge Crumpacker. He's dead."

"Dead? Good heavens——"

"I don't believe that heaven had a part in this," replied Clancy. "He died in frightful agony, sweating blood like a hemophiliac."

"Sweating blood? What caused it?"

Clancy's gaze was level and uncompromising as a pointed bayonet. "You remember hearing of his encounter with Lucinda Lafferty yesterday? Did he tell you that she cursed him?"

"Yes, but he wasn't specific, merely said——"

"I went to him when Mr. Marsten heard him groaning in his room," broke in the other.

"He was sinking fast, but trying to say something. I bent over him and heard him whisper, 'She said I'd die this way; my joints would stiffen and my eyes go blind, and I'd die in bloody sweat.' His knees and elbows were as stiff as if he had been frozen when I found him, and every toe and finger was as rigid as if it were cast iron. When I held a light before his eyes he couldn't tell the difference."

All night he dreamed of her. Sometimes she put soft hands against his cheeks; when she spoke to him the vibrant bell-tones of her voice thrilled through him till they struck responsive echoes from the smallest cell and fiber of his being. Once she leant above him and kissed him, and at the contact of her satin lips with his, he felt his very spirit melt in him with longing and desire.

Troubled and unrested, he rose early and, despite her refusal to see him till the evening, set out for her house. This was a new experience for him. In all his thirty years he had met no woman with whom he would care to link his life; now, as he walked across the frost-jeweled fields he knew that whether for an hour or a lifetime he was hers without reserve or withhold-

ing. It was almost like an ecstasy, this strangely mingled sense of exaltation and abasement; such a love was epic, like that of Hero and Leander, Pyramus and Thisbe or Romeo and Juliet . . . too wonderful, too marvelous to have come to any prosaic scientist like him . . . yet there it was. The vision of her pale, exquisite face seemed outlined in the bank of fleecy cirrus cloud that burned with rose reflection of the morning sun. A snatch from an old song, rescued from oblivion by radio, came unbidden to his lips:

"I dream of you all the day long,

You run through the hours like a song,

My dearie."

He crossed the Spellman field and then vaulted the snake fence that bordered old Lucinda Lafferty's poor land. The house of his beloved, the other, the beautiful Lucinda, must lie beyond the weed-grown orchard and the ruined mansion of the farm.

Now he was in the old crone's apple grove, and the gnarled boughs and bent boles of her trees rose round him like menacing figures in a Doré engraving. Strangely, too, the trees, bereft of leaves, shed far more shadow than he had thought possible. The sun seemed banked behind a rack of sudden storm clouds; the air was permeated with an unreal, brassy twilight, confusing, threatening. Perhaps it was the odor of the rotting windfalls on the leaf-mold round the twisted roots of the old trees, he could not say, but the very atmosphere of the place had a damp, dank chilliness. It smelled a little like the brackish water round the rotting piles of old wharves; there was something in it that made breathing difficult. A low-swinging branch knocked off his corduroy cap; as he leant to pick it up a limber twig snapped back and struck him on the cheek, not as if it were an accident, but viciously and purposefully.

He jerked his cap down low above his eyes and instantly another bough caught it and seemed to fling it off.

Something rustled in the undergrowth and flickered across his path. A squirrel? A rabbit? Possibly a cat, he could not be sure, but somehow it did not seem frightened; rather, it seemed to him, it was merely shifting position as if to get a better view of what was happening.

There came a sudden pattering. At first he thought it falling leaves, but there were few leaves on the withered boughs, and the pit-pat-patter grew into a steady rhythm, the beating of small feet, scores, hundreds of them, on the frost-dried leaves. Were they coming from the rear or in front? Or from the sides? It seemed at first as if they came from one direction, then another, finally from all around. Then something else cut straight across his path, and this time there could be no doubt. It was a rabbit running with the speed of panic, and as it passed him it seemed to say, "Get out of here, you fool—get out before it is too late!"

Now there seemed a little wind . . . no, it was no wind, it was a chorus of shrill, piping laughs, soft as chirping insects' cries, but spiteful and malicious as the cachinnation of a horde of mocking fiends. He took a running step forward, and brought up sharply with a startled grunt of pain. He had run full-tilt into a tree trunk—and he could have sworn there was no tree

there. Turning, he plunged to the right. This time there was no mistake. The tree sprang into his path to stop him. It happened quicker than a wink, faster than the flicker of a bacillus beneath the eyepiece of a microscope, but he saw it! The way was open when he leaped; then it was blocked by a tree trunk, and he was lying flat upon his back, the wind knocked out of him, his hat gone one way and his gun another, and round about him, from the earth and trees and air, the high, thin cachinnating screams of rancorous laughter sounded in his ears.

He rose and blundered on again, saw bright sunlight showing at the end of a short vista, and made for it in stumbling haste. Now he was at the orchard's edge; in ten yards he would be clear of it. He set his teeth and drew a deep breath, put his head down and sprinted.

The blow was like the hammering of a loaded bludgeon. Whether it were falling limb or shifting tree trunk he could not be sure. He knew only that something struck him on the head with devastating force, that a brilliant blue-white light flashed in his eyes and that he tripped sprawling lown into black oblivion.

The sun had sunk almost below the hog-backed ridge that broke the western horizon, and little feathers of dusk were drifting through the autumn leaves when he awoke to find Dr. Clancy standing above him. "Hullo," he greeted as he rose and felt his head with tentative, exploring fingers, "I must have slept here since morning——"

The half-jocular, half-embarrassed words died still-born on his lips as he looked into the other's face. "What's wrong?" he ended lamely.

Dr. Clancy's steady gaze bored into his. "That's what I'd like to know," he answered in a toneless flat voice. "I've been looking for you since this morning, and only just found you." Then, irrelevantly: "Where were you last night?"

A quick flush of resentment burned in Harrigan's cheeks. Who the deuce did Clancy think he was, putting him on the witness stand this way? "Why?" he jerked back. "What difference does it make?"

"It may make much. I sat with Judge Crumpacker's body last night, waiting for the coroner. It seemed unchristian to leave him alone, and sometime after three o'clock this morning I heard moans in your room. You'd been with him the day before; if he'd died from some strange infection—though I don't believe he did—you might have been stricken, too. So I went to you.

"You were crying in your sleep, like a homesick lad, but when I bent above you I distinguished words between your sobs." He paused a moment; then: "I'm used to confidences; this won't go any farther, but"—his blue eyes fairly seemed to blaze as they burned into Harrigan's—"you were begging someone named Lucinda to have pity on you, to let you touch her, kiss her, even if it were only her dress-hem or her shoes; pleading with her to accept you as her slave. Where—were—you—last—night—Edward Harrigan?"

Sullenly at first, then defiantly, finally with the ardor of a lover talking of his mistress, Harrigan retailed his night's adventure. When he told of

the tempestuous rainstorm that drove him to seek shelter at the mansion, Dr. Clancy crossed himself, muttering something in quick Latin which he could not catch, but which ended with *per Deum Patrem omnipotentem*.

"It's odd that lovely girl should have the same name as the old wi—the old woman," Harrigan concluded. "She tells me that they're constantly mistaken for each other by——"

"I don't doubt it," Clancy broke in; then, abruptly, "I don't suppose there's any hope of dissuading you from visiting her tonight?"

"Not the slightest," Harrigan replied. "I'm going to see her tonight, and tomorrow night, and every night she'll see me. If she'll have me, I'm going to marry her."

Dr. Clancy's hard gaze softened for a moment. "Would you care to tell me how you came here—under these trees?" he asked.

"I wouldn't," Harrigan snapped.

"I thought not," Clancy nodded understandingly. "Well, if you're set on seeing her, you're set on it, my boy. I've had enough experience to know that one can't argue when a man's in love."

He had no difficulty finding the house now. Clear and sharply defined against the moon-brightened sky, its chimneys rose to guide him like a landmark as he hurried down the highroad. Odd that he hadn't seen them in the morning. True, he'd approached from a different angle and his view had been obscured by the old apple trees . . . those trees! He laughed in recollection of his fight with them. Of course, he'd suffered an attack of vertigo. That was the answer. Up too late the night before, dream-troubled sleep, the shock of Judge Crumpacker's death. . . . Never mind all that, he was going to Lucinda; he'd be with her in five minutes . . . his pulses quickened at the thought.

She was sitting on the couch before the fireplace in the drawing-room as the butler Elijah announced him. The crackling fire put faint rose tints in her ivory skin, darkened the green in her long eyes.

"Edward!" Lightly as a tuft of breeze-blown thistledown, she rose to her feet and held out soft bare arms in greeting. Once again he went completely breathless at the sight of her. Tall, graceful, altogether lovely she was, a being from another world, a sprite released from dark enchantment. Her coral-colored sleeveless gown was cut low and belted tightly at her slim waist with a corded silver girdle; her silver-shining hair was piled in clustering little curls upon her head. She wore little silver sandals on her bare feet, and the scent of gardenia, mingled with an overtone of sandalwood that wafted to him from her, mounted to his brain as if it were a potent drug from Araby or far Cathay.

Was she young, mature or ageless? It was as impossible to estimate her age as it would be to determine how old a statue is. A marble by Praxiteles or a bronze cast by Cellini is as young today—or in five hundred years—as when it left the master's hands. His eager, ravenous gaze took in the grace of her slim throat, the lovely contours of her outstretched arms, the softly glowing green lights in her half-closed eyes. Here was enchantment old as

magic, potent as immortal beauty's self—and she was holding out her gracious hands, filled with the offer of her matchless loveliness, to him! He felt himself grow weak with longing. His heart beat with a hurrying, frenzied rhythm, like a madman on a drum, then seemed to stop entirely.

She moved across the room so lightly, so effortlessly and so silently it seemed that she was wafted by an unfelt breeze. She flowed toward him until he felt her breath upon his cheeks and the perfume of her silver-glowing hair in his nostrils. Then swiftly, hungrily, she kissed him. The flame of her raced in his blood like wildfire in a pine wood and crashed against his brain like an explosion. He swayed drunkenly, reaching out unsteady hands.

But she slipped back before his questing fingers found her. "You love me, don't you, Edward?" she asked, and it seemed to him amusement flickered in her green eyes. "You love me very, very much?" She drawled the question in her husky, bell-toned voice, and the magic of its timbre seemed to set his nerves aquiver, like taut violin strings.

His breath rasped in his throat. "Love you?" he echoed hoarsely. "More than anything on earth——"

"Or in the heavens above, or waters underneath?" she supplied, and an acid mockery seemed to underlie her words.

"Or in the heavens above or waters underneath," he repeated like a formula.

"You want me to be yours, and you'd be mine forever—to the end of time, and beyond?"

He found no words to answer her; a gasp was all he could achieve, but with his tortured spirit looking from his eyes he nodded.

"Then place your hand upon my heart while I put mine on yours, and swear"—she took his hand in hers and held it to her bosom, and he felt the rondure of her breast beneath his fingers as she laid her free hand on his chest—"swear without reservation or withholding that as it is with me so it shall be with you; whom I serve you will serve, where I worship you will worship——"

Dimly, like a voice heard in a dream, or from a great distance, the command came to him: "Breathe on her, Edward Harrigan; breathe on her in the name of God!"

She drew away from him and raised her lovely arms as if in evocation. Her lips were redder than blood, and lights like green lightning-flashes flickered in her eyes.

"No!" she forbade, and now her voice had lost its bell-like resonance and was shrill and thin with terror. "No, Edward, pay no heed to him. *Astarte, Magna Mater*——" Tiny wrinkles seemed to etch themselves about her eyes, her sweetly rounded throat seemed shriveling, withering, the silver-luster faded in her hair.

Harrigan felt a shiver light as frosty air run through his body. Something terrified him—it was as if an awful unseen presence had come to the quiet firelit room, a thing of dreadful, everlasting chill and terror and wickedness.

Again the far hail sounded, fainter this time: "Breathe on her, Edward Harrigan; breathe on her in the name of God for your immortal soul's sake!"

Scarce knowing what he did he pursed his lips and blew into her face saying, "*In nomine Dei!*"

She turned her great eyes on him sadly, reproachfully. He'd seen a dying deer look so at the hunter.

"Wretched man," she whispered, and now her voice had all its old-time vibrance, "what have you done? Hear me before the end comes, Edward Harrigan. My shadow is upon you. Never shall you free yourself from it; it shall come between you and every woman whom you look on; you shall see me in the sunshine and the moonlight, hear my voice in wind and flowing water——"

A roaring like the thunder of Niagara filled his ears. The room was sliding past him, breaking up, as if it were a painting on a china plate smashed by a sudden blow. He fell, rose to his knees, then fell again. Then he sat up and looked about him dazedly.

Around him was a creeper-covered, ruined wall of crumbling brick. Sumac bushes grew in rank profusion from the piles of earth and rubble. To right and left he saw the outlines of a broken chimney, topless, shattered, smothered in a growth of whispering-leaved ivy and pointing like a broken monument to the pale sky from which the stars had been wiped by the half-moon's light. "Good heavens," he exclaimed, "have I been dreaming?"

"Pray Heaven you never have another dream like it, my son!" The voice was at his elbow, and as he started round he beheld Dr. Clancy, vested in surplice and stole, an open prayer book in his hand.

"Dr. Clancy—Father!" He blinked at the vested man in astonishment.

"Yes, my son, I am a priest," replied Clancy. "Most of the members of the club are non-churchmen, and because it might embarrass them to know there was a priest present, I've used my university degree when I came up here for a few days' shooting every autumn. Judge Crumpacker knew about me; so do half a dozen others, but to most I am just Dr. Clancy. I was on my way from early mass at the village church when I met you and the judge that morning."

"But—but——" stammered Harrigan.

"I know, my son, you can't understand how I came here," Father Clancy smiled. "I've suspected old Lucinda Lafferty for a long time, but one doesn't talk of witchcraft nowadays. It does no good, and only gets one laughed at. I've had my eye on her, just the same, and when the judge told me about his experience it worried me. Not enough, though. I didn't realize how malignant—or how powerful—she was until too late. Then I found you lying in her orchard, and what you told me made me fear for you. She had killed Judge Crumpacker's body. She would kill your soul, unless I could prevent it. But what could I do? You were a victim of the glamour she cast about herself and her house by her devilish arts; it was futile to attempt to reason with you. So I followed you.

"I saw you come to this old ruin, saw you greet the cursed witch, and heard you prepare to forswear your Christian birthright of salvation. I could exorcise the foul fiend that aided her, but you had to save yourself. Only

the victim of a witch's glamour can dispel the haze that binds him. Had I sent her off with a curse, you would have remained her victim all your life, believing that the things you'd seen were really there and that she was a young and lovely woman——"

"She was—she is!" cried Harrigan. "I've seen her, kissed her, held her in my arms——"

"You think so?" interrupted the priest. "Look there!" He pointed to an object half visible in the moonlight, half obscured by shadow.

At first he thought it was a scarecrow or a pile of old discarded clothing, but as Harrigan looked closer he saw it was a woman's body, old, emaciated, clothed in filthy rags. The face was incredibly wrinkled, bone-pale and hideously ugly. Even in death there was no dignity about it, only a kind of reptilian malignancy. The hands, claw-like, with broken, dirt-filled nails, were like the talons of a vulture, red, cracked, swollen-jointed; between the slackly opened bloodless lips showed a few broken, yellowed teeth, long, sharp and pointed as the fangs of a carnivore. The whole appearance of the corpse was horrible, revolting, frightening. Yet—he caught his breath in sudden sickness—as he realized it—underneath the ugliness, the filth, the squalor, was a faint resemblance to the lovely creature he had caressed. Like a devilishly inspired caricature Lucinda Lafferty the witch had a resemblance to his beloved silver-blond Lucinda, as a skilled cartoonist's drawing may suggest, though not look like, the subject which it parodies.

"Thank Heaven you were not too dazed to hear me call to you, and to obey me," Father Clancy told him kindly. "Had you not acted when you did, and blown upon her as I ordered, we dare not think what might have happened——"

The laugh that interrupted him was dreadful, as unexpected and as shocking as a strong man's scream of pain. It was a laugh of disillusionment, abysmal, stark, complete.

These things Edward Harrigan remembers as vividly as if they'd happened yesterday. He is a dour and silent man, efficient in his work, but utterly unsocial. He calls no man his friend, no woman interests him. His little world is bounded by his laboratory and his suite at the hotel, he shuns the parks and country, no one ever sees him strolling in the sunshine or the moonlight. Usually he works till late with his test-tubes and reagents, and there is a standing order at the hotel desk to call him every morning at five.

For, as he shuns the beauties of the woods and fields, and eschews woman's company and man's companionship, Edward Harrigan shuns sleep. Dreams come with sleep, and in his dreams he sees the vision of a fragile Dresden-china figure in a coral-colored gown cut in the Grecian fashion, with silver-gleaming curls piled high upon her dainty head and soft, bare arms held out in invitation. Sometimes he speaks to her; sometimes he reaches out to grasp the slender, rose-tipped hands in his.

But she never answers, and when he stretches out his hands to hers she fades slowly from his dream-sight, like moonlight fading just before the sky begins to brighten in the east.

# *The Golden Hour of Kwoh Fan*

*by Frank Owen*

*Frank Owen confides to us that he himself has never been in China, that his vision of China is a poetic dream of his own. And yet he has been told by Orientals themselves that he embodies the romance and dreams of a yellow empire, a romance that unfortunately too often is denied to those whose vision of Celestial Asia is limited to the bustle of a shouting Shanghai marketplace or a commercial Canton street.*

“W

E GIVE too little thought to the forces which control life.” As Kwoh Fan spoke, he lifted the delicate cup of jasmine-scented tea to his lips and sipped slowly of the lush warm beverage. As he did so he closed his eyes as though he were praying. Drinking tea is as fine an art as etching or engraving.

“The real forces of life,” he continued musingly, “though seen are not realized. They are composed of lights and shadows, colors, tones, harmonies, rhythms, perfumes and sweet music. Color, I believe, is one of the main props of existence. Plants derive their gorgeous colors from the solar spectrum, especially in the Orient. That is why yellow predominates in China. The yellow-golden skin of gorgeous China girls—what could be more superb? Or the sacred yellow robes of Buddhist priests. China is different from all other countries primarily because of the presence of this pungent color. It swirls over everything like a flood. It brings on drowsiness and lassitude. My people are yellow people steeped in yellow. If white or red predominated, the whole history of China would be different. Its very existence is directly traceable to color, which in turn goes directly to the sun.”

As Kwoh Fan paused, Coutts Cummings surveyed him meditatively. After all, to a great extent, life was a mystical puzzle. It was odd to be sitting in that room in a house so immense and magnificent it was a veritable palace, and to know that it stood in one of the most silent, least inhabited spots in China far beyond the Western Hills of Peking. Every luxury of the Occident and the Orient had been drawn into its building until it had almost become as famous and mystical as Kwoh Fan himself, Kwoh Fan, the philosopher, the dreamer, Kwoh Fan who was fanatical in his pursuit of loveliness. About his house lingered lovely Chinese serving girls, golden-



yellow girls with almond eyes, sleek black hair and vivid lips. Their gowns were silken and of every shade and hue, as soft as though they had been fashioned of moonbeams or flower petals. Flower petals they resembled in the manner in which they clove to the gorgeous golden bodies of the girls.

Kwoh Fan spoke English perfectly without the slightest suggestion of an accent, pronouncing each word distinctly as though it were a lovely jewel. His eyes were sombre languid, brooding, which was fitting; for he was a philosopher whose fame had spread throughout the length and breadth of China. In Mongolia, Manchuria and even into far Tibet and Nepal the Kwoh Fan legend was whispered unto little children. Some had it that he conversed with dragons, others that he disported with foxes in the moonlight, while again it was told how he climbed up the clouds in the evenings.

Now as they sat sipping jasmine-scented tea, Coutts Cummings studied his host reflectively. At Peking he had heard the Kwoh Fan legend, though at Peking it had not been so fantastically distorted. According to the story there related, Kwoh Fan was a worshipper of all that was beautiful, of a dew-drenched blossom, of a glowing green emerald, or the pungent yellow body of an exquisite maiden. Kwoh Fan was intoxicated by loveliness. He tried to steep himself in it. Through loveliness he endeavored to banish everything harsh and sordid from his life. Fortunately he was immensely wealthy so he could afford to be eccentric in his enthusiasms. His palace was a veritable poem of soft tones and harmonies.

"For variation," said Kwoh Fan, "a cup of pearl-orchid scented tea and I will be content."

A girl brought him the tea as he spoke. He sighed softly as the tips of his fingers lightly touched her hand.

"Life itself," he meditated, "in its fullest sense is naught but a flower."

He quaffed languidly at his tea. "The tragedy of existence," he continued, "is that few of us ever realize the attainment of one perfect hour until it has passed. Each of us has an allotment of one perfect hour, one perfect hour in an entire life. It is the memory of that hour which makes the balance of life worth living. Memory is best preserved in sweet perfume. Perfume and light are the only two things in the Universe comparable to color. The three are interchangeable, collectively making that divine thing—perfection. No flower is ever lost that once has bloomed, nor can a perfume ever vanish that has been breathed into the air. Perfumes can absorb pictures to smallest details. Not infrequently a piquant perfume floating to one's nostrils recalls the exotic vision of some beloved woman. One of your poets, Baudelaire, I believe, has fashioned this truth into verse that is lyrically beautiful. Lavender makes one think of old English ladies creeping softly through the ancient halls of gabled houses. Aloeswood brings poignantly to mind Oriental princesses. The bazaars of every country have their own particular odors. And in those odors are preserved pictures of the incidents and occurrences that have emerged from embryo there. Perfume possesses more divinity than any religion or any creed."

Kwoh Fan rose abruptly to his feet.

"If you wish," he said impulsively, "I will take you to a room like unto

none other you have ever beheld. Nobody ever enters it but myself, though now I am moved to escort you there."

Coutts Cummings needed no second bidding. Slowly he followed Kwoh Fan down marvelous halls dim-lit with glimmering lanterns. Occasionally draperies fluttered in the breeze emitting a wondrous purple fragrance. Once or twice a slim girl disappeared around one of the many curves of that winding hall. The floor was covered by rugs of velvet softness. Everything was hushed. At last Kwoh Fan stopped. He drew a key from the sleeve of his coat and unlocked a great door. The next moment they were in a room entirely hung in dark blue draperies. At one end was a huge glass window through which the sun gleamed like an orange-gold lantern. It blended perfectly with the blue-soft sheen of the draperies.

"It is like living in the skies," said Coutts Cummings softly.

"It is far better," said Kwoh Fan, "for in this room is the famous 'Jade Jar of Ilibar.'"

As he spoke, he parted the velvet curtains at one end of the room and there in a crypt stood a huge jar covered with carvings and fantastic designs. Its extreme age could not be questioned. Centuries had passed over it like years.

Kwoh Fan clutched Coutts Cummings by the shoulder. "It is the rarest antiquity of earth," he breathed intensely. "It is of more value than all the famed jewels of India. No rajah has treasure like unto this. For sealed within this jar are a few drops of the rarest perfume ever drawn from flowers. Within the perfume are hidden all the wondrous scenes and adventures through which this jar has passed. Some day I will remove the cover, permitting the sweet perfume to issue from it. I have purposely had this room builded for that precious day. Can you imagine that perfect hour when all those wondrous scenes will loom up before me even as they appeared more than a thousand years ago?"

Late in the evening after the daylight had expired, Coutts Cummings wandered alone in the Chinese garden which surrounded the palace. The air was heavy with the breath of countless flowers. A soft breeze blew lyrically through the treetops. From the distance came the sound of music and the sing-song drone of celestial chanters. Overhead a yellow moon shimmered down, throwing the fronds of the trees into strong silhouette. It was a night of magic. The air was so cool it brushed his cheek like the soft hand of a Manchu princess.

Coutts Cummings breathed deeply of the fragrant air. The memory of that ancient jar in the blue-velvet room haunted him. He sighed softly as he re-entered the palace. In a lounging room he found Kwoh Fan listlessly drinking tea.

At his entrance, Kwoh Fan looked up drowsily. "Come linger here awhile with me," he said. "Before retiring I always drink a few cups of the supreme liquor of all—blue-poppy scented tea. It brings happiness through forgetfulness. Drink with me until the night grows old."

Kwoh Fan clapped his hands and a girl as frail as a flower brought a cup of the fragrant-scented tea and placed it on the table before Coutts Cummings. For a moment he breathed of the pungent vapor, then slowly

he lifted the jade cup to his lips. The tea was odd but not unpleasant to the taste. It coursed through his veins like old wine. He glanced toward Kwoh Fan. Life at that moment seemed very good. A perfect languidity hung over the room.

Kwoh Fan was dozing. He was breathing contentedly. But Coutts Cummings' perceptions seemed doubly clear. He drank once more of the blue-poppy scented tea, and as he drank fantastic thoughts crammed through his comprehension.

Before him lounged Kwoh Fan. He was sleeping. Within his sleeve was the key to the velvet room wherein the antique jar reposed. Coutts Cummings leaned toward his sleeping host. He touched his hand but Kwoh Fan did not move. He touched his cheek. But still he stirred not. Finally Coutts Cummings sprang to his feet. Stealthily he drew the key from Kwoh Fan's sleeve. The next moment he was gliding down the heavy-carpeted hall. Not a sound stirred within the palace.

Finally he arrived at the great door that led to the blue-draped chamber. His hands shook so he could scarcely insert the key in the lock. But at last the ponderous door swung open and closed behind him and he found himself in that room of romance and enchantment. There was no lantern lighted but the yellow moonlight streamed through the great glass window. It lighted up the blue folds of the draperies. Now more than ever they resembled the open sky. It was as though he stood beneath an immense inverted blue bowl. Softly he walked toward the green jar. He caressed it for a moment with his hands. Then from his pocket he drew a knife. Bit by bit he chipped away the wax that sealed the top; until all had been removed.

For a moment he hesitated before reverently lifting the cover. As he did so he sprang back, falling among the cushions and gazing in awe at the jar. At once a perfume like unto nothing in his experience commenced to pervade the room. Stronger and stronger it grew. It stirred up a thousand emotions within him.

And as he watched the jar it seemed as though a strange light were coming from it, a yellow golden glow as soft as the mist of rainbows. Gradually it increased in volume until it filled the room. It was a shower of soft gold that enmeshed him like a web. The room was quaintly brilliant now, yet it was not a room at all but a golden sunlit street. In the distance camels and mules were ambling toward a purple-golden sunset. Gone was the room of pungent draperies, while this strange city loomed up to take its place. Only the jar still remained. And now from the jar there stepped a maiden so peerless in beauty that his eyes burned at the sight of her. She was formed as perfectly as the rarest flower. Her silk-soft waist was of rose-petal texture. Her garments were simple, though not without some trace of costliness. The firm lines of her lovely body were accented by them rather than concealed. Like old ivory was her face and her lips crushed pomegranates. They were more scarlet than rubies and sweeter than wild honey. Her eyes were blacker than the black dungeon beneath Wan Shou Shan, and her cheeks were faintly pink as are coral beaches at sunrise.

Coutts Cummings gazed at her and his mind forsook him. So lovely she

was, his reason snapped. He crouched among the cushions and whimpered like a child. And as he sobbed she danced. And as she danced she slowly cast aside her garments until she stood before him a slim golden statue of a loveliness to ruin kingdoms.

He sprang toward her. But as he grasped at her his fingers closed on thin air. She existed only in the charming golden mist of the perfume. Again and again he tried to grasp her to draw her lovely form to his that he might kiss those lush red lips.

But ever he failed. He was reaching back through the dust of a thousand years to kiss a once famous dancer, the memory of whom had long vanished from mortal minds.

Above that dream of long ago there came a frightful din. Kwoh Fan had awaked from his slumbers. He had discovered the key was missing. And now he was outside the door pounding upon it and bellowing like a wounded forest animal. But his pounding availed him not. It could not seep through to Coutts Cummings' consciousness.

Finally it occurred to Kwoh Fan to try the door. It yielded to his touch. As he rushed blindly into the room he heeded not the exotic perfume nor did he see the gorgeous picture which hung in the perfumed golden mist.

He was consumed by hatred, hatred of the guest who had dared to enter his sacred blue chamber. He felt as though he were stifling, as though every bit of air had been drawn from the room. He was nauseated, strangling. In a paroxysm of frenzy he drove his arm through the great glass window.

At once there came a draft of clear cold night air. It stirred the golden mist. The lovely dancing girl shuddered, then slowly the whole picture commenced to dissolve, to float toward the open window. It was a perfumed vision only and the perfume was fading at the onslaught of the air.

Coutts Cummings crouched on the cushions. His eyes were wide with wonder. And now he beheld his gorgeous girl, the girl who had made prisoner his consciousness, dissolving into the very air. He emitted a wild cry and rushed to the window, just as the perfumed mist of the little dancer floated silently past. He grasped frantically at her form. As he did so he leaned far out of the window, so far that he lost his balance and fell. Down, down, down his body dropped until it was grasped in the cool soft arms of the river far below.

Kwoh Fan remained by the window. He gazed far off toward the stars. At last his anger had vanished. It had floated away like the mist of perfume. Kwoh Fan was a great philosopher. Throughout China his fame was legendary. He had devoted years of his life to study and profound meditation. He had lived for that one perfect hour when he would be able to view the visions which lay hidden in the jar. And now that hour had come and gone. The pictures had been before him but he had seen them not. He had always loved beauty, endeavored to drench himself in it. Yet in the supreme moment of his existence his hatred quite outweighed his love.

Kwoh Fan sighed softly. He returned to the tearoom.

"Life," he reflected, "is very strange." And he poured himself a cup of pearl-orchid scented tea.

# Uncommon Castaway

by Nelson S. Bond

Nelson Bond, who made his start in the regular pulp magazines, rapidly graduated from that class to star his fine fantasies in the pages of the better popular magazines. Gifted with an easy, smooth narration, his themes may vary from trick inventions to hypothetical reconstructions of the beginning and end of man. In "Uncommon Castaway" he spins an anecdote of the recent war—an odd little adventure which might explain in modern terms one of the older mysteries of recorded lore.

H

EED ye! 'Ware and repent, I cry, and woe to him who will not hear my warning! For verily I say unto you that the Day of Judgment neareth, when for your sins and your iniquities shall be visited upon you the fire and the sword of Those whose fury maketh the earth to tremble; yea, the very seas to burn!

They shooed us out of Alexandria when Rommel pressed past Mersa Matruh and down the long sandy highway that leads to Cairo. Shooed us, but fast. The Admiralty said there was nothing we *could* do but hide out in safe harbors until events disclosed whether Montgomery's plan for a last-ditch stand at a dot on the map called El Alamein was sound strategy or—as almost everyone feared—pure desperation.

The Old Man hated like blazes to run. When I handed him the order, he grunted and his teeth met through his pipe-stem. He didn't even swear. Which just proves how deeply he was moved, because the skipper is an educated man. He cusses fluently in six languages. At trifles.

But this was too big. He just shook his head and said, "Very good, Sparks. Carry on!" And turned and walked forward, very fast.

So the *Grampus*, under cover of a jet Egyptian night, slipped out to sea and safety. It was a strange leave-taking. The West Harbor was like a coal-pit; even the lighthouse on Raset-Tin was blacked out. But the darkness was alive with sounds. The incessant wash of Mediterranean waters against the crags of Pharos . . . the high, flat notes of a bosun's key, piping-thin against the sigh of a westerling breeze . . . the mute ripple of voices from ships that glided dimly past, cheerless as drifting wraiths. Gray sounds, angry sounds. The petulant farewell of vessels evacuating a harbor that had

been, but a few short months ago, Britain's proudest base along the North African coast.

"We're to be first out," the Old Man told us. "The fleet will need every sub. Particularly if the Jerries take Alex." He added, glancing skyward speculatively, "The deck guns will be manned. There may be trouble."

But there wasn't. We didn't lose a single ship or a single man to enemy action throughout the operation. Funny, too, because we were fish in a barrel for the Stukas. Jammed in the bottleneck too tightly to offer effective resistance, and many of us in foul shape. Like the *Grampus*, which had put in for G. O. and repairs, and got her sailing orders before the job was half finished.

But maybe it wasn't so strange, after all. The Germans were pretty cocky in those days. And I suppose they had reason to be. But their very cockiness was our salvation. I think they didn't bomb us during our flight simply because they expected to take Alexandria any day, and didn't want to move into a shattered naval base.

Anyhow, we cleared the breakwater without a sign of trouble, and were under way. We weren't told where we were going, but since our course was due nor'east, it was clear to every man aboard that Larnaca was our goal. Cyprus, a mere three hundred sea miles away, should have been a snap day's journey, but no one was starry-eyed enough to think we'd make it that quickly. There was, for one thing, the constant possibility of encountering enemy craft, aerial or seaborne. Moreover, a dropping glass warned of weather ahead. And to further louse up an already gloomy picture, our spit-and-prayer-patched engines started coughing and spluttering even before we cleared Pharos light.

Auld Rory, our cook, didn't like the situation, and said as much when I braced him for a cup of tea in the galley after we were safely out to sea.

"'Tis a verra bad business, this," growled the old Scot, "'Tisna richt for a navvy to roon awa', wi'oot even makin' a fight for't. 'Tisna"—he scowled, fumbling for the word he wanted—"tisna *deegnified*!"

I grinned and told him, "Maybe not, Rory, but it's a lot healthier. As Shakespeare says in 'Paradise Lost,' 'He who fights and pulls his freight, will live to fight some other date.'"

"The noble Bard," gritted Auld Rory savagely, "didna write 'Paradise Lost.' 'Twas the great John Milton. Nor is the verse as ye've misquoted it, ignorant Yank that ye are!"

"I've told you a thousand times, Rory," I chuckled, "that I'm *not* an American. I'm a British subject, born and diapered in dear old Fogville-on-the-Thames."

"Your words make ye a liar!" flared Auld Rory. "Ye speak the mither tongue as if it had na feyther."

"That," I said, "is because I grew up in Brooklyn."

"Oh? Ye told me once New York."

"A suburb of Brooklyn. You must come with me to Flatbush one day, Rory. Quite a place. You ought to hear the Ladies' Day crowds at Ebbets Field yelling at the umpires. '*Moider dat bum! Give him de woiks—*'"

"Bum!" gasped Rory, outraged. "Wi' ladies present? 'Tis indecent. I'm ashamed o' ye, Jake Levine!" He brooded darkly as I sipped my tea. "And I *still* say this is a bad business. In the harbor, at least we had shore batteries and a *def*ensive position. But that wasna gude eno' for the brass. No! So here we are, alone and limpin' in the middle o' the gory Mediterranean, prey to God knows *what* yon rascals will send to plague us! 'Tis a wonder we ha' na already been attacked, that it is."

"Calm down, Rory," I laughed, "and give your ulcers a rest. These waters are reasonably safe. Bet you five bob we don't even *sight* an enemy, let alone . . . Hey!"

What a prophet! My forecast ended in a startled yelp as the unmistakable *gurroom!* of a deck gun shuddered through the ship. The *Grampus* bucked and quivered. Tea scalded my wrists. Voices rose in excited query, and were lost in the strident clamor of the ship's alarm system.

And over it all: "I'll take that bet!" bawled Auld Rory.

I broke from the galley and raced toward the radio room. Weaving through the passageway, I met members of the gun crew scurrying from topside to their submersion posts. I grabbed Rob Enslow's arm.

"Planes?"

"The bloody sky's full of 'em!"

I heard their motors now, droning with the fretful tumult of a broken wasps' nest. The Jerries had not wanted to blast us in harbor, but were coming out to catch us in open sea. The intercommunicating system hummed to life. The Old Man's clipped, unhurried voice was oddly reassuring.

"All hands, stand by! Rig for diving!"

The valves opened, the wheeze of escaping air mingled with the gurgle of ballast water, and we nosed under. I reached my compartment and lurched to the instrument panel. Walt Roberts, ship's yeoman, was there. He glanced up.

"You all right, Jake?"

"Sure," I said. "You?"

"Top hole." Then, after a moment: "We're under."

I nodded. "Yeah. We'll be okay now, unless some of those big babies carry depth-bombs."

"That's so," said Walt. "But maybe they didn't this time."

"Probably not," I decided. "It must be a land-based flight, out of Bardia. I'll bet there's not a depth-bomb in the lot of them. . . ."

Or that's what I *started* to say. I don't know if I ever finished the sentence or not.

For suddenly there sounded a dull, booming roar. The *Grampus* jerked as though struck by a monstrous fist. Then it seemed to shake itself and leap, like a sailfish fighting the hook. Again the alarm bell dinned—then stopped abruptly as the lights flared to brief, eye-searing brightness and went out! A hot, tingling pulsation, like electricity gone mad, flowed through and twisted me in knots. The *Grampus* tilted, my feet flew out from under me and I slid head first across the slanting deck. My head struck the bulkhead. That's all I remember.

The umpire bawled, "Stub-rike!" I jumped to my feet, roaring fury shared by bleachers full of fellow-townsmen.

"Go get glasses, you bum!" I hollered. "That ball was a mile outside!"

I picked up my cushion and spun it onto the diamond. A hand fell on my shoulder, and a park cop glared at me malevolently. "Okay, you! Come wit' me!"

I said, "Get your hands off me!" and struggled to shake myself free. Someone—a friend in the crowd—cried from a distance, "Jake? Are you all right, Jake?"

"Let go!" I snarled. "This is a free country! Let go, before I—"

The hand clutching my shoulder tightened. The voice drew nearer and clearer. "Jake? Are you all right, Jake?"

Ebbets Field faded; its sun-drenched bleachers became the lightless, dank interior of the *Grampus*. The hand and voice belonged to Walt Roberts. "Jake—"

"Okay," I said. "I'm okay, Walt." I craned my neck gingerly. "Thanks, pal. You just saved me from ten bucks or ten days."

"Eh?"

"Skip it," I said. "Where are we?"

"On the bottom. That depth charge did something to us—I don't know exactly what. Fortunately it's not so deep here."

"That's swell," I said. "That's perfectly ducky!" I was scared spitless, but I wasn't going to let *him* know it. "If we were fish, we wouldn't have far to go. Are we taking water?"

"No. Apparently not."

"Then what's wrong with the batteries? How come no lights?"

"I wouldn't know," said Roberts.

"Well, let's go see," I suggested.

We felt our way through the ship, and met others doing the same thing. There was tenseness, but no panic. And don't get the idea that discipline had been relaxed, just because we were allowed to do what we wanted. It was just that the Old Man has brains, as well as braid. He knew how everyone felt, and so long as no one got in the engineer's way, he allowed us to satisfy our curiosity.

There were emergency lamps in the engine room, and a sweating corps straining over the motors. The chief engineer was not so worried as frankly bewildered.

"Oddest thing I ever saw, sir," I heard him tell the Old Man. "It's not just concussion damage, or a short. It's as if the whole electrical unit had been picked up and—and *twisted* out of shape, somehow."

"That's the way it felt," grunted the skipper. "The ship seemed to writhe and wriggle like an eel."

"Yes, sir. The bus bars are a solid lump. And the wiring—" The chief shook his head.

"But you can fix it?"

"I think so, sir. Yes, I'm sure we can."

"Very good. Carry on!" The Old Man turned quietly to the rest of us.



"You heard the chief, lads. Now you know as much as we do. Let's all go to our stations, and let these men work."

So we did, and that was that. Some time later, the lights flickered on again. After another long, hopeful wait we heard the tentative hum of the diesels, followed by the throb of a turning shaft. Then the skipper's voice over the intercom system, "All hands, attention. All clear. We're taking her up." . . .

It was broad daylight when, after making certain no enemy craft were in the vicinity, the *Grampus* surfaced. We were under a blanket of radio silence, of course, but in the hope of sighting a friendly vessel, the skipper told me to get my flags and come along topside with him.

That fresh air sure smelled good. And the sun *felt* good, too. But we'd lost the other ships in our convoy—if you'd call it that. The horizon was clear as far as the eye could reach. Not a dot on the water.

No, there was *one* dot. The Old Man spotted it before any of us, levelled his binoculars on the dancing black fleck and grunted thoughtfully.

"A man. On a raft, or a spar. A survivor, perhaps. I imagine one of the ships didn't get off as lightly as we did." He sighed. "Bring her about, Mister. We'll pick him up."

The second saluted and ducked below. A few minutes later, we hove within hailing distance of the derelict.

Now, here's where the whacky part of my story comes in. You'd think that survivor should have been tickled pink to see us, wouldn't you? Would have waved and yelled at us?

But not *this* lunkhead! For the longest time, he didn't even seem to see us. Or if he did, he tried to let on like he didn't. He wouldn't answer our calls, though we must have been within hearing range.

"Deaf?" wondered the skipper aloud.

"Possibly, sir," said the second. "But he must *see* us. He could at least call for help."

"Deaf and dumb?" offered the skipper.

"Or," I suggested, "just plain dumb, sir?" Because at this moment the man definitely saw us. He rose from his awkward kneeling posture, but instead of waving his arms, or part of the tattered rags in which he was clad, the damn fool loosed a hoarse cry of alarm, leaped off his rickety old raft, and started flailing *away* from us as fast as his skinny arms would carry him!

The Old Man grunted understanding. "Oh, now I see! An enemy. Very good! Fetch him aboard, lads!"

So we did. But we had to knock him unconscious to do it. Two of the seamen went into the briny after him. Catching him was like wrestling a barracuda. He kicked and bit and clawed, and almost scratched one of Bill Ovens' eyes out. That made Bill a bit peevish, so while his comrade grappled with the guy, face to face, Bill slipped up aft and let him have it behind the ear.

And the *Grampus* had picked up a passenger.

Some time later, when I was telling Walt about the fracas, the Old Man buzzed me.

"Levine? Would you step forward, please?"

I found him waiting for me before the compartment in which our passenger had been locked. He took his pipe from his mouth and stared at me thoughtfully.

"Levine, you're Jewish, aren't you?"

"Why, yes, sir."

"Orthodox?"

I said, "No, sir. My mother and dad are, but I—"

"No matter," he said. "Listen!"

He nodded toward the door. From within came sounds—the voice of our passenger talking to himself in a high, thin, rising-and-falling whine. Syllables emerged from the patter, and made sense. A word here and there, a phrase.

"Why," I said, "that's Hebrew!"

"That's what I thought," said the Old Man. "Can you speak it?"

"I can understand it," I said. "Most of it, anyway. I speak Yiddish better."

"Good!" grunted the skipper. "Come in here."

He ushered me before him into the compartment. For the first time I got a real look at our unwilling guest. He was a queer-looking duck. Lean and hot and angry-looking, with great, smoldering eyes that made you want to crawl when he turned them on you. Not with fear or disgust. With something else. I don't know just *what* it was. A sort of—well, awe, maybe. That's the closest I can come to it. A feeling that if you didn't watch your step, something pretty terrible was going to happen to you.

He had coal-black hair to match his eyes, and wore a straggly beard that accentuated rather than minimized the acid-bitter thinness of his lips. His high cheekbones had a consumptive flush, and his nostrils were pinched.

He looked like someone I'd seen once, somewhere, but I couldn't remember who it was, or where, or when.

His chanting wail stopped abruptly when we entered, and he cringed, frightened but defiant. Like a trapped animal, I thought.

The skipper said, "Speak to him, Jaké."

I said, "Hyah, pal!"

"In Hebrew."

"Oh!" I said, and took a whack at it. It was heavy going, because I'd forgotten a lot. I said, "Greetings! My name is Levine, Jacob Levine. Can you understand what I am saying?"

Could he! His sultry eyes lighted, and he burst into a torrent of words.

"What is he saying?" asked the skipper.

"Too much," I complained, "and too fast!" I shook my head at the old guy. "Too fast," I said in Hebrew. "You must speak more slowly."

He cut his motors a few hundred thousand r.p.m., and at a more moderate tempo I began to catch his drift. He was, he declared, a humble man, and we were the mighty ones whom he feared. He was too meek and miserable a mortal to be the victim of our wrath. He kissed our feet and begged that he be freed. If we loosed him, he would sing our praise forever.

"Well?" asked the Old Man.

"Sweet talk," I said. "He's scared stiff."

"What's his name?"

I passed along the query, and got a tongueful of polysyllables that would have sunk a freighter. It was one of those old-fashioned family-tree monickers—so-and-so, son of so-and-so, son of somebody else, ad infinitum. When I tried to pass it along to the Old Man, he shrugged.

"Tell him we'll call him Johnny for short. Where did he come from? Was he on one of the evacuation ships?"

No, he had been on a merchantman.

Had his ship been sunk in last night's raid?

Raid? He had seen no raid, neither last night nor any night. He was a humble man, unworthy of our attentions. He wished but to be freed . . .

Then where *had* he come from. What was his ship, and where had it sailed from? Whither bound?

I relayed his answer to the Old Man. "His ship was the *Warrior King*, Tarshish, bound out of Joppa with a cargo of salt, wine and linens."

"Joppa?" frowned the Skipper. "That would be Jaffa, near Jerusalem. But Tarshish? Perhaps he means Tarsus, in Turkey? But that's not a seaport. Oh, well, it doesn't matter. How long has he been floating around on that raft?"

"Three days," I learned from our passenger.

"Then he wasn't shipwrecked last night. Is your wireless working, Sparks?"

"To tell you the truth, sir, I don't know. Everything's happened so fast, and we've been under silence—"

"Yes, of course. Well, get it working and contact Larnaca for an index report on the—what was it?—*Warrior King*. If the registry is Allied or neutral, I suppose this old fellow is harmless."

"Yes, sir," I said. "Right away, sir."

"Oh, and before you go, tell our friend he's in no danger. That we're not going to eat him up." The Old Man chuckled.

I translated the message. The results were—well, astonishing, to say the least! Old Whiskers loosed a little bleat of gratitude, then hopped up from his squat and hurled himself at the Old Man's feet, bowing and slobbering like the skipper was on a pedestal or something.

The Old Man backed away, startled and embarrassed.

"I say, old chap! You needn't be so blasted. . . . Look out! Careful, there! Oh, *damn it!* Damn it all!"

He glared fretfully at his right hand, bleeding from a long and nasty gash. Retreating from Johnny, he'd snagged it on a bolt-head and ripped it open from forefinger to wrist. He clamped a handkerchief to the cut, swearing magnificently.

"Lock him in again, Sparks. I've got to take this to the medico. Carry on!" And he left.

I said to Johnny savagely, "Now, see? *You* caused that!"

I expected a torrent of apologies and denials, but I was wrong. Johnny

just stood there, his lips ashen, his eyes bleak and haunted. He whispered mournfully, "Yes . . . I know. I know . . ."

Well, I went to the radio room and warmed up the tubes. Then, confidently, because a quick examination indicated everything to be shipshape, I twisted the verniers to see who was saying what on which cycles.

Nothing happened.

I got my tools and went trouble-shooting. I found one loose connection and a condenser that didn't test right. I fixed these, and tried again.

Nothing happened.

I tried the transmitter. *It* seemed to work. I rigged up a playback and cross-checked. Nothing wrong there. So I got out my blueprints and went over the whole set from aerial to ground, making any minor adjustments that seemed necessary. Then I tried once more.

And drew a blank.

I went to the skipper. I said, "I don't understand it, sir. If I were getting nothing at all, it would prove there's something wrong with the set. But I *am* picking up static, so the receiver's operating. But I can't pick up any broadcasts, long- or short-wave."

The Old Man was mighty nice about it. "Don't worry about it, Sparks," he said. "It's probably something rather unusual, connected with our crash dive. Just keep working on it."

"But I can't raise Larnaca, sir."

"No matter. We'll be there in the morning. We'll make inquiries when we get there. By the way, you'll mess with me tonight."

I gulped, "Me, sir?"

The Old Man smiled. "Yes. I'm having Johnny as my guest, and I want you to act as interpreter. Will you?"

"Yes, sir!" I said.

"Johnny's on his way here now. I asked the second to go and fetch him. We'll—Good Lord, what's that?"

"That" was a series of thudding bumps just outside, followed by a sharp, agonized cry, then moans. We were out the door in a flash. The second lay groaning at the bottom of the companionway, his left leg doubled queerly under him. Johnny, standing over him, was wringing his hands and wailing frantic self-recriminations.

"It was my fault. I did it. I did it."

"Langdon!" cried the Old Man. "What happened?"

From between teeth clenched with pain came answer. "I don't—know, sir. I must have slipped on the last step. It's my—leg, sir."

"Did that man shove you?" I cried angrily.

"No. Of course not. It was just an accident."

But Johnny's stricken moaning did not cease. "It was my fault," he cried over and over. "I did it. I . . ."

From now on, I can't explain the rest of my story. All I can do is tell it, and let you write your own ticket. It's strange. It's mad. It's impossible. But . . .

We arrived at Cyprus in the morning. And I put it that way deliberately. The skipper had said we would reach Larnaca in the morning, but we didn't. We reached the spot where Larnaca should have been. And it wasn't there!

That doesn't make sense? Right! It didn't make sense to us, either. It was a fine, bright, sunny morning. When we eased into the rounded harbor that should have been jammed with refugee ships, should have been aglitter with all the panoply and bustle of a British naval base, we stared incredulously at a narrow strip of beach rimmed by a few dilapidated fishing shacks.

Four of us were topside—the skipper, the third, Johnny and myself. When we stared into that yawning, desolate basin, the third cried uncomprehendingly, "But—there's something wrong. I *can't* have made a mistake, sir!"

The Old Man took the sextant from the third's hands. He shot the blazing sun with painstaking care. Then he stood for a long moment, gnawing his lip, his eyes gray and distant. Finally, "Mr. Graves?" he said.

"Yes, sir?"

"You will change our course, please. We are going to the mainland."

"Yes, sir. Right away, sir."

The mate vanished below, obviously relieved that he had been spared a dressing-down. I said hesitantly, "Are we very far from Larnaca, sir?"

The Old Man said in a curious, strained voice, "I don't know, Sparks. Possibly *you* can tell *me*. Which is the farther—a million miles, or a million years?"

"I'm afraid I don't understand, sir."

"No," he said slowly. "Nor I."

"But you said something about the mainland?"

"Yes. We're going to land our passenger back where he belongs. That much if nothing else."

"How long will it take, sir? A couple of hours?"

"I wish to God it would," said the Old Man tightly, "but I fear not. When did we pick up Johnny?"

"Why, yesterday morning, sir."

"Exactly," sighed the skipper. "So it will take us two days to reach the mainland."

To tell the truth, I thought the Old Man had slipped his moorings. The Lebanese mainland is not more than five hours from the island of Cyprus. But the skipper was right! It took us two full, nerve-racking days to reach a coast we should have made easily before sundown.

First the motors conked out. Then, when the chief got them turning again, the electrical system went haywire. Generators spitting and sparking like firecrackers, for no apparent reason. When that was repaired, one of the bulkheads started oozing suspicious drops, and we had to heave to and jury-rig patches before the leak got worse.

Those were the major difficulties. There were more minor ones than I can enumerate. Working on the damaged motors, one of the engineering

crew lost half of a finger. One of the oilers came down with a fever—a malarial fever, for Pete's sake, smack in the middle of an inland sea! Then something whipped up for mess by Auld Rory must have come from a tainted tin, for on the second morning half the crew turned green and started upchucking all over the place.

Oh, it was a sweet voyage! Bad luck seemed to have taken over the *Grampus* in a big way.

Somehow, my private luck held, except for the fact that our passenger, finally recovered from his initial fear, had turned into a human question box. From morning to night he pounded my ear with questions. What was this vessel upon which we traveled, he wanted to know, this wondrous vessel which rode at will on or below the waters?

It was a submarine, I told him.

A submarine? And what was a submarine?

The *Grampus*, I told him. The *Grampus* was a submarine. Now, go sit in the corner and croon lullabies, Pop!

Aie, what marvels! The grampus was a submarine. So be it! But what was a grampus?

I knew the answer to that one, too, having looked it up in an encyclopedia when I was assigned to the ship.

"A grampus," I said, "is a type of dolphin, sometimes known as the 'killer whale,' because of its fighting habits and deadliness. Not a bad name for this crate, Pop. We've done a bit of killing already, and we'll do more, as soon as we get patched up for another crack at the Nazis."

He said solemnly, "You make war upon the evil ones?"

"You can say that again," I told him grimly. "They think they've got us licked, but we've just begun to fight. Our day is coming—and soon."

He wanted to know what we fought with, then, and I got a chance to show him, because this quiz program went on during one of the blowtorch-and-hammer sessions, and the Old Man had decided to let the gun crew fire a few trial bursts while we were hove to, just to keep their hand in. With his permission, I took old Johnny topside to watch.

He stared, with sagging jaw, as they stripped the gun and loaded it. And when it fired, belching a gout of flame amidst a roar of thunder, he practically went out of his head. He cut for the rail, and if I hadn't clutched his tattered nightgown, he'd have been back in the drink again, only without a raft.

Anyhow, that quenched his curiosity. He was glad to get back to his own quarters and stay there. Which gave me an opportunity to work some more on my incomprehensibly mute receiver.

I was going over my circuits for the 'teenth time when the skipper wandered in and stood there watching quietly. At last he said, "No luck, eh, Sparks?"

"Skipper," I said flatly, "there's *no* luck aboard this ship any more. Here or elsewhere."

"I know what you mean, Jake," he nodded. "It's almost as if we were hoodooed, isn't it? Jinxed?"

"It is, sir. I'm not superstitious, but—"

"Nor am I," said the skipper, "but I'm curious. I wonder if . . . Sparks, you've studied electrical transmission. Tell me something, will you? Just what *is* electricity?"

I shook my head. "I'm sorry, sir. Nobody can tell you that. No one knows."

"Electronics," mused the Old Man. "In the theory of electronics, isn't there something about electrons being in two different places simultaneously?"

I said slowly, "I remember something, sir, vaguely. Nils Bohr, I think. An electron moving from one cycle to another without ever having been in the space between. But I never could understand it, and I never tried. I'm no scientist. I just work with the equipment the smart guys invent." I stared at him. "But why do you ask, sir? Is it—"

"Just—curious," repeated the skipper. "Perhaps the answer lies there, somehow. But it doesn't matter. We can't do anything about it. Just wait and see what we find when we reach the mainland."

"But I don't understand, sir," I said. "What are you expecting to find?"

But he didn't answer me. He just stood there in the doorway sucking at his cold pipe, staring through me off into space.

On the morning of the fifth day after our flight from Alex, we sighted the mainland. It was a dull, gray, nasty morning, lowering with thick blankets of black cumulus that threatened to split at the seams any moment. The dim roll of thunder growled threat of a storm to come as once again the skipper, Johnny and I stood on the weather-deck. There were two seamen, too, waiting till the Old Man should give expected orders.

"Well," said the skipper, "this is it. In a few minutes we'll be as close in as we dare go. Then we'll put him ashore, Sparks."

I said, "But didn't the third set course for Beyrouth, sir?"

"Yes."

"There are docks there. We won't have to lay off shore, sir."

"Really?" The Old Man smiled a faint half smile. "I wonder, Sparks. I hope you're right, but"—he gestured, as briefly the dark overcast lifted, giving us a glimpse of the shoreline we approached—"but, you see, you're wrong."

It was Larnaca all over again. There was no naval base at Beyrouth, but I knew it to be a modern Near Eastern metropolis, doubly astir nowadays with war activity. And the drowsy little village I beheld was far from modern. No building on its shoreline was more than one story in height, the few ships in its inlet were shallow-draft wooden vessels of single-span canvas or none.

I said, "Skipper, I think I know what's wrong now. There's only one possible explanation. Your sextant's gone haywire, that's the trouble—"

"No," said the Old Man, "there's another explanation. Don't you *see*, Sparks? Don't you *see*?" Then, shrugging as I just stared at him blankly: "Ah, well! Let's not delay. Tell Johnny goodbye for me, will you?"

I turned to the old geezer, who had been watching the coast draw nearer

with a kindling tenseness in his gaze. I touched his skinny shoulder, and he started.

"Well, Johnny, this is it. We're putting you off now."

He nodded. "So be it. I am yours to command."

"Anything else, sir?" I asked the skipper.

"Nothing else, Sparks. What is to be, will be."

I turned to Johnny. "I guess that's all," I said. "Except a private word on my own hook, Pop. The skipper's sure you're okay, or he wouldn't be turning you loose this way. I don't know, myself. We don't know whether you came off a friendly ship or an enemy. And you've had the run of the *Grampus* for three days. You've seen a lot more than a civilian's supposed to see."

"I am a meek and miserable servant," said Johnny, slipping into the old routine of formal, stilted phraseology, "unworthy of the wonders that have been shown me—"

"Yeah, I know. And you're a gone goose if you go back and spill what you've learned. Understand? We know who you are, and if you turn out to be on *their* side, we'll come and get you. Is that clear?"

Johnny's strange, fanatic eyes gleamed. "I hear and obey," he said strongly. "So be it. I gird my loins to battle the forces of evil by your side."

"Okay," I said. "Then—so long and good luck!"

I gave him my hand to shake, but the idiot didn't. Instead, he crouched and kissed it. I yanked it away, embarrassed, glancing at the skipper swiftly. But the Old Man simply sighed and nodded, almost as if that were what he expected. He spoke to the sniggering seamen.

"Very well, lads."

They lifted Johnny into the inflated raft we were scooting him off in, and shoved him off. The sea was high and choppy. The Old Man nodded. "Oil, lads."

The boys broke loose a canister, smoothing a patch around the *Grampus* and the life raft. Johnny moved away slowly, and we watched him go until the skipper said abruptly, "It's raining, lads. We'd better go below."

The first fat drops of rain turned swiftly to a driving sheet as we ran to the tower. The closing hatch dulled the rumbling drums of thunder. The Old Man frowned.

"Sad old beggar! I hope he makes it to shore before he's waterlogged!"

He moved to the periscope, cranked it around to cover Johnny's passage.

"Can you see him, sir?" I asked. "Is he—"

"He's made it. He's landing now. I see people . . . *Gad!*"

The Old Man shouted, covered his eyes with his hands, and fell away from the periscope blindly. I cried, "What is it, sir? What—"

Then my voice caught in my throat, even as I put out a hand. For the *Grampus* was humming . . . yes, *humming!* . . . with a wild, outré cacophony of sound unlike anything I've ever heard. A weird tingling burned through my veins, and black vertigo danced before my eyes. I couldn't breathe; I couldn't stir. I seemed to be rising . . . falling . . . turning



. . . dropping through unfathomable depths of burning blackness to a screaming emptiness. . . .

As suddenly as it had started, it ended. And the Old Man's voice was croaking in my ear.

"Gad! Sparks, are you all right?"

"Yes, sir," I faltered. "I think so, sir. What was it? What happened?"

"Lightning. A direct smash, forward. I thought for a moment it had blinded me. And—look!"

He gestured to the eyepiece of the periscope. I looked—and drew back. The sea about us was in flames from the lightning burst igniting the oil. I suddenly remembered Johnny. I said, "The poor old bloke! He must think we've been burned to a crisp."

"Or," said the skipper, "that we disappeared in a sea of flame."

I gaped at him stupidly.

"Look again, Sparks. Beyond the fire. The shore."

I looked. The flames were gone. The storm-clouds had vanished, and the sky was crystal blue. There was a patrol-ship racing toward us, a bone of froth in its teeth, the Union Jack astern. White, modern buildings rimmed a harbor abristle with docks and quays, the glory of a modern seaport. The city was—Beyrouth!

I said, "But—but I don't understand, sir! How did we get here?"

The Old Man said quietly, "When the patrol arrives, Sparks, I will tell them we had trouble, and drifted off our course. I dare not tell them the truth. They'd never understand. No more than you do—or I do."

"Understand what, sir?"

"Where we have been," said the Old Man, "or when. I'm not sure I can explain, Sparks. Perhaps there's a clear and logical explanation. Possibly you were right about the sextant; we misjudged our position off Cyprus. And maybe we were all insensible for a few minutes after that lightning struck the ship. I don't know. Maybe we've been laying off this harbor for an hour."

"But the village we saw?"

"Dimly, through a brief rift in the fog. There is such a thing as a mirage."

I said boldly, "You don't really *believe* that, sir. You're just rationalizing."

He groped for his pipe and pouch, steadying shaken nerves with old, familiar movements. "Yes, Sparks, I am. Logic rejects what I *really* believe."

"And that is, sir?"

"Suppose electricity were somehow connected with time? Then what?"

"With *time*, sir?"

"The present and the past," mused the Old Man, "and the future. Days and hours leaping like electrons from one place to another, without ever having passed through intervening space. A bomb scored a near miss on the *Grampus*, and everything was strangely changed. Lightning struck us—and we have returned to our proper era."

"You mean we've been in the—"

"The past—yes." The skipper's pipe was lighted, now, and with its

indrawn fragrance he relaxed. He smiled at me. "It does make sense that way, Jake. If I were a better Christian and you a better Jew, we might have understood earlier. Think! Doesn't our passenger remind you of anyone?"

"He always did," I acknowledged. "From the moment I first laid eyes on him. But I can't seem to— Wait a minute! Now I remember. An old rabbi I knew when I was a kid. A fiery old man, like an ancient prophet."

"Your wireless worked, but received nothing. Suppose there were nothing to receive?"

"Skipper, I—"

"There was a man," said the skipper softly, "who set forth from Joppa to Tarshish to escape the service of the Lord. But where he traveled, punishment pursued him. And his shipmates rose against him, casting him adrift . . ."

The small hairs tingled on my neck, and a coldness crept up my spine. I was remembering, now, the stories. The old, old stories told by taper-light, and the liquid cadence of the cantor's voice.

The skipper said, "Three days, Jake. He was three days our passenger aboard the *Grampus*. And you told him what a grampus is."

"His name?" I whispered. "His name!"

"We called him Johnny," sighed the skipper. "The nearest English equivalent to the first part of his long name. But his real name, Sparks, was . . ."

*Heed ye! 'Ware and repent, I cry, and sue Their mercy ere it be too late; this do I bid and warn. For I have dwelt amongst Them; mine eyes have seen with awe Their strength and righteous anger. These have I seen; yea, even I . . . Jonah of Gath-hephur, prophet of the Lord!*

# Mogglesby

by T. S. Stribling

*The Tarzan theme, the story of man against the jungle, of humanity weighed in the balance against anthropoid ape, and of the mystery of the origin of the hairless tool-making primate, has fascinated the world. "Mogglesby" is such a story, a true classic of jungle adventure and of a lone civilized man pitting his bare hands against the challenge of the ape. T. S. Stribling, a former Pulitzer Prize winner, noted for his novels and for his colorful detective stories, is the author of a rare but superior handful of science-fiction stories. "The Green Splotches" is the one readers are most familiar with. "Mogglesby" your editor considers to be a story to rank with that one and we believe this to be its first reprinting.*

## *Note by the author:*

The writer met Mogglesby only once. That was at the governor's house in the port of Ghandis in British Baloongaland, West Africa. Along with Mogglesby, of course, was his satellite, "the doctor."

The three of us were having tea with the governor. In saying this the writer does not wish to convey that Mogglesby or the doctor, or indeed he himself, had any social standing whatsoever beyond the simple fact that all three were white men. In Ghandis white men appear so infrequently that tea in the governor's house, like the sunshine, falls indifferently upon the worthy and the unworthy.

To illustrate how casual was the rite of tea. To this day the recorder of this narrative does not know the doctor's name. The little man was never properly introduced. After Mogglesby had presented himself and the writer to the governor, he waved a paw at his little rat of a companion and added—  
". . . and your Excellency, that's the doctor."

And the doctor was so precisely the sort of person one would call "the doctor" or "the professor" or something of the kind that none of us thought of inquiring into a more identifying name, even if such an inquiry had been in good form on the West Coast, which it was not.

At this too late date the writer regrets that he did not make some effort to establish a permanent contact with the doctor. If he had done so there might be still some way of getting hold of the little man, interrogating him, sorting out, possibly by psycho-analysis, what was true and what was false in the fantastic narrative which the doctor related on his return from their expedition into the land of the Baloongas.

The writer realizes that nothing whatever depends upon the verity or falsity of this story, or at least nothing beyond one small facet of the conundrum. The simple truth might be of some hagiological value in approximating the amount of physical fact in other primitive chronicles of the saints. Say, for example, the English legend of Saint George and the Dragon.

In person Mogglesby, the hero of this West African chronicle, was not a prepossessing man. He was huge and sun baked. He looked like a great sagging brown leather edition of a medical book describing what whisky and the native women will do to an Englishman in equatorial Africa.

The only suggestion the writer received of the extraordinary physical strength ascribed to Mogglesby by the doctor's saga was a very slight incident. The wicker table on the governor's piazza holding the gin and soda sat at a little distance from Mogglesby's chair. Once, when he wanted to refill his glass, he reached with a little grunt of inconvenience, got his thumb and finger on the edge of the table and lifted it to him—lifted, not dragged, for dragging would have upset the bottles.

This really must have been a feat of strength, but at the time it was done so casually that no one gave it any particular notice, and the writer barely recalls the incident.

At the time, the governor was talking about the hinterland of his province. He said the customs and practices of the Baloongas were very unsocial, that he tried to discourage them but they broke out again at any popular excitement.

"What sort of customs are they?" asked Mogglesby.

"I regret to say the Baloongas drift toward anthropophagism," admitted the governor.

Mogglesby straightened in his chair.

"Cannibals!"

"As I say, sporadic cases in times of popular excitement."

"What causes them to break out like that?"

"You mean the fundamental cause?" inquired the governor. "It's a theory of mine, Mr. Mogglesby, that it's the damned gorillas kidnapping their women."

It seemed to the writer that the governor was probably rationalizing, seeking an excuse for a hideous custom merely because the Baloongas were now his own people and a part of the empire. He asked how his Excellency had ever come by such a notion.

"The black men do not look upon gorillas as we do," explained the chief official. "They do not regard them quite as animals; more as a kind of terrible people, if you understand what I mean."

"And just how does that lead to cannibalism?" inquired Mogglesby, curiously.

"When the natives manage to kill a gorilla they roast and eat it, of course. I think they have an idea that its strength and courage will pass into their bodies."

"That's the usual explanation," agreed the writer.

"Yes, but don't you see, since the line between human beings and the anthropoids is not clearly drawn in their minds, how easy it would be for the practice of eating the simians to slip across the boundary into eating men."

"It's a terrible blot on the empire for such a thing to exist," said Mogglesby, leaning forward in his chair.

"What is needed is almost a religious reform," ventured the governor. "Not so much a prohibitory law as a sense of the unique position of man in the scheme of nature, and that, of course, is religion."

The big brown leather man drained off the last of his gin and leaned forward.

"I wonder if the doctor and I could go out there and be of any service, Governor?" he asked. "We never have been of any service, either of us to any one, not even to ourselves."

"It ought to be interesting," said the governor, "an attempt to widen the gap between gorillas and men in the consciousness of the Baloongas—and it might possibly be dangerous."

This is really as far as the writer overheard this conversation, because at this point the rector put in his appearance at the Government House and took us in tow for the Anglican church. It seemed that it was an important day religiously, because a number of new converts had been made among the nearer Baloongas and they were come to take the blessed sacrament for the first time.

After the services I did not see Mogglesby again. Neither did I learn whether he and the doctor ever started for the uncivilized Baloongas, or with what credentials they were armed.

However, three months later I did encounter the doctor a second time in a village on the Belgian Congo. The meeting was quite odd. At first the doctor denied his identity. He swore up and down that he had never heard of such a man as Mogglesby. He persisted in this denial even when I recalled the details of our conversation on the governor's piazza. This denial, however, the doctor made when he was completely sober.

Several hours later, when he told me the story of what happened to Mogglesby, the doctor was very drunk. Indeed the writer would gladly put the whole narrative down to the fumes of an alcoholized fancy were it not for the fact that the doctor's tale held implications entirely beyond the reach of that little rabbit of a man's comprehension.

#### Note—

After the galley sheets of this article were received from the printer the editor cabled the English governor at Ghandis for any confirmation of the facts herein set forth. The governor cabled in reply that on August 28th the uncivilized Eastern Baloongas of his province did come *en masse* and become communicants of the English church in Ghandis. Whether that proves the story, or whether the story arose out of the conversion of the cannibals, remains a matter of speculation. Any readers of this periodical in or near Ghandis, British Baloongaland, West Africa, are invited to send in statements of anything they know about the matter. Any such communications would be of more value if given under the formal jurat of a notary.

At the editor's request, the writer has cast his material in the form of fiction to avoid the prolixity and repetition of unedited conversation.



ON THEIR fourth day out of Ghandis, Mogglesby and the doctor came to the eastern limits of the civilized Baloongas. On the morning of the fifth day, Mokato, the head-man of the

village, accompanied them through the jungle, trying to dissuade the two white men from their dangerous enterprise.

The tall black man's earnestness in describing the hazards of the adventure and the wickedness of the heathen Baloongas could not be doubted.

He, Mokato, himself, was once a heathen Baloonga and he knew them. Their hearts were black with wickedness and treachery. They told lies. They murdered without reason or enmity and devoured their victim without remorse.

As a matter of fact Mokato was a very recent convert of the Anglican minister in Ghandis and he had the warmth and zeal of a new faith upon him. When he spoke to the white men he called them brothers in Biblical fashion.

As he talked thus, swinging along the trail at the heels of the pack-mules, the head-man glanced down consciously now and then at his clothes. He wore the white man's regulation trousers and shirt and had discarded his ear plates. The lobes of his ears from which the plates had been taken hung down in loops almost to his shoulders. These black empty loops were the chief sign that Mokato had given up savagery and had become a civilized man. He kept fingering them as he strode along as if conscious of them without the ear-plates.

Mogglesby inquired why some effort had not been made to civilize these eastern Baloongas.

Brother Spence, the Anglican minister in Ghandis, had not got to them yet. He, Mokato, was the head-man of the most eastern village which Brother Spence had converted.

The ponderous, sagging Englishman with his gin-shot face told Mokato that he, in a way, he supposed, was on the very errand Mokato described; that is, the conversion of the uncivilized Baloongas.

"Why, you will be killed!" cried Mokato, staring at him.

"How is it," asked the wizened doctor, "that Parson Spence can go among the Baloongas in safety, while I and Mr. Mogglesby can not?"

Mokato was surprised. Brother Spence was protected by the angels. Did not his white brothers recall how an angel came down and broke open the jail to deliver Saint Paul? Did any one imagine that angel could forget Brother Spence among the savage Baloongas?

The doctor screwed up his eyes and glanced aloft at the crown of a palm tree hanging high above the jungle trail.

"I would think, Brother Mokato, that an angel who had seen active duty under Saint Paul would be getting a bit old for service among the Baloongas."

Mokato was astonished.

"An angel in heaven get old, brother?"

The big Englishman glanced around at his partner and said in an undertone—

"Shut up!"

"How is it," asked the wizened doctor, "that Parson Spence can go among on the clinking mules. Presently he began on another tack—

"These uncivilized Baloongas, are they really so bad, Mokato?"

"Every thought of their head is wicked, brother," said Mokato.

"Oh, come now, you are a Baloonga yourself, even if you have thrown away your earplates and wear shirts and trousers. I don't believe you were such a bad man, Mokato."

The head-man frowned, a little jealous of his former wickedness, as most new converts are.

"Brother, I was utterly given over to wickedness and lies."

The little man wagged his head and laughed.

"What did you do that was so bad?"

The head-man seemed a little aghast at what he really had done.

"I—belonged to the M'Bembi, brother," he said in an undertone.

"What's that?"

"A secret society, brother."

"With signals and passwords and all that?" inquired the doctor with interest.

"The M'Bembi have signals and passwords," admitted Mokato, glancing around amid the bush.

"What kind of a signal do they have?" inquired the little man curiously.

"I promised Mombo never to reveal it, brother." Mokato showed the whites of his eyes in his black face and fingered the empty lobes of his ears.

"Who is Mombo?"

"He is the go—the idol in the lodge of the M'Bembi, brother."

"There you are," said the doctor. "You are not supposed to keep a promise to an idol, Mokato. The holy angels would scratch their heads and not know what to think to see Mokato, their new convert, keeping a promise to an idol."

"I haven't kept my promise to Mombo, brother," said the black man. "I have given the sign three times already while we were talking about it."

"The devil you have! Well, I didn't catch it."

"I can't furnish you with eyes, brother," said the man with the looped ears.

Mogglesby broke out laughing.

The little Englishman watched the Negro with sharp, rat-like eyes.

"Let him make it again, by Jove; next time—" his face suddenly lighted up—"I caught it, I know the signal!"

"Can you make it?" asked Mokato, a little crestfallen himself now.

"Not with my shoes on," crowed the doctor. "Isn't that the deuce of a way to throw a sign—with your toes?"

The big Englishman interrupted this quizzing with his heavy voice—

"I imagine you had a hard time, Mokato, changing from the customs of the M'Bembi to the way Parson Spence wants you to live?"

"Wickedness is a strange thing, brother," said Mokato. "A man misses it. When I feel moved to fall back into my old ways, the angel fights in here and keeps me from it." The black man tapped his chest.

"You do want to go back sometimes," observed the little doctor.

"When I am asleep," said Mokato, "the devils come and put things in

my head. I think I am the keeper of the club again. I imagine I am going forth on a hunt. I wake up. There I lie awake on my mat thinking how easy it would be to get up and go join the brotherhood of the M'Bembi again." The black man ran a red tongue over his thick lips and shook himself. "I pray to the angels to put such thoughts out of my head."

The black man was interrupted by the lead mule suddenly wheeling in the trail and bolting back on the procession. The three men shouted and flung up their arms. Mogglesby caught the animal and stopped it.

"Look ahead there," he directed, peering into the jungle. "It might be a snake or a panther."

Then as the men chivvied the animals forward again, Mogglesby caught a peculiar scorched odor amid the hot smell of the jungle.

The doctor slipped past the animals and disappeared in the screen of the dense growth. Mokato hurried after the little man.

"Brother! Brother! Come back!" he warned sharply. "Don't go about the place!"

Mogglesby hurried after the white-eyed Negro.

"What is it? What's the doctor getting into?" he asked anxiously.

"Brother, he's getting into the temptation of the devil!" cried Mokato in alarm, as he sniffed the air with his wide nostrils.

"I mean is there anything to hurt him?" cried Mogglesby.

"It will hurt his immortal soul, brother," advised the black man in distress.

At this point their colloquy was interrupted by the doctor's voice calling in shocked tones:

"For God's sake, Mr. Mogglesby, come look! I've found the devil himself!"

This was so opposite to what Mokato had been saying, that the big man pushed his way through the screen, drawing his handkerchief as a defense against the odor. A moment later Mogglesby saw the doctor peering through the vines into a small charred circle in the jungle. There was an expression of horror on the little man's face.

Mogglesby went up, hardly knowing what he would see, and a moment later his own revulsion stopped him in his tracks. The clearing had been burned over. In the center of the circle lay a huge prone figure partly charred and partly stripped of its flesh. Its right arm was missing from its elbow, the left, of an extraordinary length, was stretched forward on the ground. The thing was headless.

In the heat of the jungle the odor of decomposition already had set up, although the burning appeared recent. The big man turned to Mokato with a question and saw the black man down on his knees, his thick lips moving.

"O Lord," the Negro was saying, "the devil has led me into this temptation. Lead me away, Lord; take my hand and lead me away."

The Englishman stared in the utmost amazement.

"For God's sake, Mokato, what earthly attraction or temptation could any human creature find in—"



The black man opened his eyes, looked at Mogglesby, then his glance flickered irresistibly at the charred circle.

"Brother," shivered the new convert, "the M'Bembi have been here. They have killed this—this poor man—danced about him—cooked and eaten him."

Implications of the macabre and the repulsive flickered through the white man's head.

"How in the devil are you framing this up in your head as a—a temptation, as anything attractive?"

"Brother, I—I once belonged to the M'Bembi. Once I would have danced and—murdered and—eaten—"

"So this attracts you?" ejaculated Mogglesby incredulously.

"The bad part of me," hastened Mokato, tapping the right side of his chest, "but my heart, which I have given to the Lord, it hates this."

"Well, I don't see how it is possible—but that's neither here nor there. Come on; let's be getting on."

Mokato shook his head.

"Brother, I am going back to my village and pray that I may never think of the M'Bembi again."

"Why the change?" asked Mogglesby, amazed.

"I am a weaker man than I thought, brother," said the Negro, fingering the empty lobes of his ears.

At that moment the conformation of the skinned and mutilated figure caught the big man's attention.

"Why look here, Mokato," he cried. "That's not a man anyway."

"It's a wood-man, brother," said the black man, evidently holding his eyes away from the thing by force of will.

"Exactly, a gorilla." Mogglesby nodded. "I can't say much for the niceness of such a meal, but I can't see why you have any moral objection to the M'Bembi killing and eating a gorilla if they feel like it."

"But, brother, it's a wood-man!" cried Mokato.

"If you mustn't eat a gorilla because he's a wood-man," satirized Mogglesby, "then you mustn't eat an oyster because he's a sea-man, or smoke a pipe full of tobacco because it is a field-man."

The black man arose slowly from his knees.

"Wouldn't the Reverend Spence condemn eating—" Mokato nodded toward the prone figure.

"Listen," said Mogglesby, turning his nose from the thing. "The governor and Parson Spence sent me out here mainly to tell the Baloongas that a gorilla is not a man. Of course, now it does look a little like a man."

"They break down the Baloonga banana trees, brother," pointed out Mokato.

"Well, they may commit sabotage like a man."

"And they talk—"

"Oh, come now."

"Yes, brother, they talk. My cousin, old Luomo, can talk with the wood-men."

"Oh, all right, I grant you they may make simple signals with their chattering."

"And they steal our girls and marry them!"

"Very well, I don't believe it, but I'll grant you—"

"But, brother," protested Mokato earnestly, "they do steal our girls. One of them stole my cousin Luomo and they lived together for five years."

"Impossible!"

"Yes."

"Then what happened?"

"Why, Luomo came home again; the wood-men sent her away so she had to come home. But that is why she understands everything they say."

"Well of all fantastic—all right, I grant you that, too, they may chase women like a man but, Mokato, that doesn't make them men. They're just gorillas."

"Brother, what does make a man?" inquired Mokato simply.

"It's psychological," said Mogglesby, leaping to the safety of vagueness. "There is a mental gap between men and animals, Mokato, that is impassable. The human race has drawn so far away from the animals that it is perfectly all right to kill and eat them. It's just like eating a—vegetable or a nut."

"God has no love for the wood-men he made?"

At this the doctor piped up with—

"Oh, Mokato, Mr. Mogglesby doesn't believe—"

The big man snapped off his satellite with:

"Shut up, will you, Doctor? I'll explain my beliefs and disbeliefs. He made them for our benefit, Mokato. He made everything for the benefit of man, the animals to eat, the trees to shade him, the oranges—"

The black man nodded.

"Yes, Dr. Spence told me all that. And I have thought that He might have made the lions and boa constrictors much smaller and weaker, and fish not so hard to catch—but, of course, as Dr. Spence says, it is good for us to exercise our bodies by avoiding the lions and our wits in catching the fish. It all improves us."

"The Reverend Spence will be disheartened to hear how you felt about a dead gorilla, Mokato," reproved Mogglesby, edging away from this matter of justifying the universe. "And then for you to desert us on our way to the uncivilized Baloongas, that would be shirking your duty, Mokato."

This last impressed the black man. The group returned to the trail through the jungle where the mules were still restive from the odor of the burnt flesh. As they started forward again, the doctor fell in quietly at the black man's side.

"Just how does it feel, Mokato," he asked curiously, "to sit in on a dinner like that? Is it the taste, or—or the murder—or what is it?"

"Listen, brother," shuddered the Negro in a distressed tone, "don't think about such things. Put them out of your heart. O Lord, put such terrible thoughts out of my soul. Let me guide these white men to the Baloongas and then go back home."

Toward nightfall the men and their mules were sensibly beyond the influence of the English settlement in Ghandis. In the branches of an ebony tree they had glimpsed a black man with vast, round, pendulous ears watching their progress through the jungle. Their way grew rougher. Eventually they found themselves on a mountainside looking down on a distant fire, which in the half light was neither smoke nor illumination, but a suggestion of both. The steady booming of a tom-tom came to their ears through the gathering darkness.

The black man, Mokato, stood listening to it, evidently torn between painful impulses.

"They are making ready for one of their feasts, Brother Mogglesby," he explained desirously. "Perhaps I'd better not go any farther. You can get there by yourself from here."

"What sort of a feast?" asked Mogglesby.

"The drums say they are going to eat a wood-man."

"You can tell by the drums?"

"Yes, the way they beat."

"Well, we won't go into the right and wrong of that any more," said the big Englishman. "I want to go on down there while there's light to see the trail."

The little doctor began pressing the black man to come on with them. What was the difference between eating gorilla steak and eating beef steak? Would Mokato not like to see his old friends among the M'Bembi?

Mogglesby moved down from their point of vantage into the obscurity of the lower trail. He told his companions once more that he wanted to go on while he could see. The little white man and the tall black man were still absurdly arguing in the last of evening light, when a turn in the trail occluded them from Mogglesby's view.

The big Englishman picked his way down into the booming valley with a feeling of faint irony for this new convert of the Reverend Spence. The white man tried to imagine what fascination there could be in cannibalism. That there was such a fascination is more than evident every time white men try to break up the practice among primitive people, but why should such a monstrous custom cling to a people?

As the man strode along between two dimly seen walls of bushes and vines, his reflections were interrupted by a queer aspirated chatter somewhere in the darkness ahead of him. He paused to listen, then saw a vague form holding up a warning hand and hurrying toward him in the gloom.

There was an urgency, an intensity of gesture about the dim figure that drew the Englishman up at once. He called out in the flat but confident voice of a very strong man who is not afraid but who has been startled,

"What is it? What do you want?"

At the sound the figure seemed to melt into the undergrowth and vanish.

This extraordinary dénouement hurried the Englishman forward to where the thing had been. He stopped, listened with his mouth open and heard the faint rustling which a large animal makes when slipping away among dense growth.

The queerness of something signaling and then vanishing bit at Mogglesby's nerves. He made a lunge toward the retreating sounds. He crashed through the vines and an answering noise ahead of him told him the thing had whipped back into the trail again. The big man pushed back himself then set off down the rough, half-seen descent at a breakneck pace. As he plunged forward with the long falling steps of a man running downhill, he sensed a movement among the bushes in the side of the trail. He flung himself into them and made a full arm grab at whatever was trying to hide. His arm caught flesh and blood of strong odor, and the next moment teeth bit into his forearm.

He jabbed in his right hand, caught the thing in the neck and gripped furiously. Came a scream, a choking sound, then a kind of simian chatter. Whatever it was, it was helpless. Mogglesby backed out of the tangle with it. It was a person. The white man got out his cigar lighter with unsteady fingers and snapped the flint. He saw first white frightened eyes in a black face. A moment later he saw to his amazement that it was a woman. He had caught and choked a black woman into submission.

The woman herself stood in his grip, her eyes and mouth agape at this sudden and irresistible onslaught upon her. In the small flame of the lighter, the man noticed the heavy African style of her face, her heavily chiseled lips, wide nostrils, her wool done in an odd symmetry and matted smooth as felt.

"Why were you waving at me a moment ago?" asked the Englishman, looking at her curiously.

"I—I thought you were some one else, *buckra*," stammered the black woman.

"Who?"

"I—thought you were a—wood-man, *buckra*."

"A gorilla! My God, aren't you afraid of a gorilla?"

At this she maintained a frightened silence, and she would say nothing more, Mogglesby turned her face down the trail, held her with one hand just above her elbow, and the two moved toward the village through the darkness.

As they advanced the drumming grew in volume. The jungle through which they moved gave way to banana trees and then to an open space in which the the last murky light of evening disclosed a Baloonga stockade. By this time the fire inside the walls had gathered intensity and poured a faint illumination over the conical tops of the huts inside the stockade, and silhouetted in black the form of a spearman who stood on top of the gate in the wall.

This spearman was the Englishman's objective. He moved ahead with the woman amid the uproar of the drums. When he was close enough to shout against the din, he was just filling his lungs, when suddenly the black man on top of the wall flung up his *assegai*, pointed it downward, and the next moment his arm and body snapped forward. A split second later the Englishman felt or heard something hiss between him and his

captive. Then he became aware that the *assegai* was stuck in the earth a few feet behind them while its long shaft still quivered between them.

The anger of utter outrage swept over Mogglesby. He roared out to know what in the hell the guard meant, flinging a spear without warning.

The black guard on the gate appeared frightened in his turn. He disappeared with the suddenness of a marionette. Through the interstices of the poles Mogglesby saw him jump down and go running toward the huts. A little later he heard a score or more voices approaching the stockade from the inside.

The Englishman began walking backward in the open space to be out of immediate range of their spears if this reenforcement should decide to throw their *assegaïs*. The black men, however, did not line up on the wall as Mogglesby had feared. They flung open the gate and came out into the dark field shouting:

"Ho, Jolo did not know you. He only recognized the woman Luomo."

Mogglesby listened to this loud apology in angry amazement.

"You say he recognized the woman! By Jove, does this Jolo let fly an *assegai* every time he sees the woman Luomo?"

Among the black men pouring out to meet him came one bearing a torch, a dignified man whose enormous earplates lent a conventionality to his bearing.

"Master," said this leader, "Jolo crawls in the dust. His head is under your feet."

"But why did he throw in the first place, if he recognized the woman?" pressed the white man tartly.

The dignified leader with the torch lifted a placating hand.

"It was dark, master, and he thought you were surely some one else."

"Who else?"

"You won't take offense, master; it was very dark. It was impossible for Jolo to see you."

"Yes, that much is all right," agreed the Englishman, his curiosity overcoming his anger to a great extent. "Now I'd like to know who he thought I was. Who is the usual companion of this woman at whom your guards first fling an *assegai* and make inquiries afterward?"

"Master," said the dignified man with the torch, "the truth is, Jolo thought it was a—wood-man."

"A gorilla?"

"It was dark," repeated the head-man quickly.

"That's all right, but for you to imagine this woman—to come with a—"

Mogglesby stared at the woman he had caught and whom now he, unconsciously, had liberated during this incident. He recalled the peculiar chattering noise she had made when she had first approached him in the jungle and a sort of creepy feeling went over him. He looked at her in the light of the head-man's torch. She was of generous Juno proportions and would have been handsome in Mogglesby's eyes if her features and hair had not been African. But the idea that this woman went out deliberately to meet . . .

"Why in the world do you imagine this *Luomo* would approach the village with a—"

The head-man shrugged a shoulder.

"Master, we don't imagine it; she does."

He evidently dismissed the topic as uninteresting, for he turned back toward the gate and with a gesture invited Mogglesby's company. The others turned too, and the procession started back. The head-man's name was Loaga. He hoped Mogglesby had a pleasant journey from Ghandis. Where were his two companions?

The Englishman said he had left them a little way behind and he almost went on to say that Mokato was deciding whether or not he would come in but thought it better to delete that information from his small talk. Then he asked Loaga how he came to know of his company's approach.

One of Loaga's men had seen them on the trail, and as he was explaining this he turned to a spearman and said in an aside—

"Go tell Sammu to put out the fire."

As the man started off, Mogglesby lifted a hand at the messenger.

"Wait a moment," he suggested to the man; then he turned to Loaga, "As you know, or may guess, I was sent here by the governor at Ghandis. He wants a report on everything. If Sammu has a fire burning, let it burn on."

The head-man became disturbed.

"Listen, Master," he said earnestly, "this fire I ordered put out, it—it has a bad odor. It is a fire of the refuse of animals, hair, entrails. When the governor's agent comes around—"

"Oh, no, not at all, not at all," declared Mogglesby in a complimentary tone. "There is nothing I would take more pleasure in reporting to the governor of Baloongaland than a good system for the cremation of garbage. Really, there is nothing—here, boy, you come back and stay behind us, will you?"

"Master, the fire is nothing," insisted the head-man uneasily. "You must be weary. Let me give you some palm wine first."

"No, I'm not at all weary," assured the white man who was now in reality directing the return procession with Loaga immediately behind him.

Mogglesby's objective was clear enough. The fire over which this polite strife had arisen was just ahead of them near the center of the Baloonga village. It cast a brilliant light over the conical grass huts near it and over a huge grass building just beyond it. The smoke of the fire, rising up, caught the illumination and shone in dull umbers against the night blue sky.

As the Englishman, with the Baloongas behind him, marched down the central street of the village toward this place, a gruesome tentative explanation trickled through the white man's mind. He wondered whether he had surprised the black men in the preparation of one of their unspeakable feasts.

He moved a little more quickly toward the fire, trying to make casual his scrutiny of the *milieu*.

The flames which illuminated the huts and big house leaped out of a kind of crude stone furnace. In a pit in front of this furnace worked a small wizened figure with a ladle and a sort of pot. The pot, Mogglesby suspected, held gruesome evidence. He quickened his steps, expecting to see the wizened black devil of a chef put the pot somehow on the fire.

Loaga, the head-man, called out with an attempt at a concealed warning—"Sammu, the governor's agent!"

"Go on with your work!" interrupted Mogglesby. He turned to the dignified Negro. "I don't want to stop anything."

Very probably both calls were unheard in the subdued roar of the fire. The monkey-like creature in the pit dropped his ladle, seized a poker and began jabbing at the base of the furnace. Just as the crowd came up around the pit a stream of liquid fire burst out of the hole where Sammu had punched. The mannikin seized the clay container and with all his straining muscles and tendons in his neck outlined in the brilliant light pouring at his feet, he swung the pot under and caught it. Then he leaped back, rubbing his skin where the hissing sparks had found him out.

Mogglesby stepped back to Loaga's side, blinking his eyes against the incandescence. He turned away and motioned with his thumb.

"I'm interested to know what's in the pot, Loaga," he inquired.

The head-man's face lengthened.

"That devil Sammu—I don't know what he has put in."

"It looks to me about the right size to hold a head," said Mogglesby—and thought to himself, "Of all damnable and elaborate ways of cooking a human head."

"I don't know," repeated the head-man uneasily.

"We'd better see," suggested the Englishman. "Let's open the thing and take a look."

The head-man became unexpectedly complaisant.

"All right, let's open it. Come, Sammu," he called to the little chef. "Open up the pot!"

The wizened black man came out his absorption before the fire.

"What?" he called above the noise of the flames.

"Open the pot, so the white man can see what's in it."

"No, not yet," he called in a voice hoarse from heat.

Loaga stepped forward quickly and took a spear from one of the men.

"Yes, Sammu," he ordered, and lifted his weapon to break open the clay.

The next moment the cook Sammu thrust aside the *assegai*, leaped out of the pit and laid into the head-man with extraordinary agility. What rendered him formidable was his hot poker. Loaga began trying to fence the iron aside. Three or four spearsmen ran in to get a jab at the pot. Sammu swung his red-tipped iron on them, leaping and swinging from one to another. It was an absurd sight, the big black men jumping away from the chef's iron and careful not to touch the little man with the edge of their long keen blades.

Then suddenly, while two lancers held Sammu's poker in quod, a third

black man dropped his *assegai*, darted in and bowled over the doughty champion of the pot. Sammu went backward into his own pit. As he went down, he shrieked out—

"Break it gently, brothers—gently."

The head-man had uplifted a lance for a mighty blow, when the queer scene moved the Englishman to shout for the head-man to stop. The white man leaped down into the pit himself. He went to the pot, hardly knowing what to expect. He found that it was completely covered with clay, and he remembered having roasted chickens and fish by rolling them in mud and dropping them in a fire.

Sammu got himself upright and came to Mogglesby's side.

"Master," he said, in a voice shaking after his struggle, "you take off the clay like this." And he produced a piece of sharpened iron and began peeling away the covering with swift expert strokes.

What Mogglesby now expected he hardly knew. He half braced his nerves to see a gruesome sight, and yet when a flake of clay dropped from Sammu's point, the white man was not greatly surprised to see a dull glowing surface. More clay fell and Mogglesby saw the little man was uncovering a surface of heated metal.

For a few moments the governor's agent thought this might possibly be an inner metal pot when the metal began to take the form of a face. It was a face still faintly glowing from heat; it was a face unimaginably ferocious and hideous. It was the molded head of a gorilla. When it was exposed to the air the outer skin quickly cooled to a bronze sheen, but the deep sunk eyes remained red and shining with the inner heat.

As he stood looking at it, it suddenly burst upon the Englishman that he was staring half dazed upon the most extraordinary and amazing piece of realistic sculpture he had ever seen.

Sammu, who was watching Mogglesby's face, must have read there the white man's approbation of the casting, for the little man suddenly began snapping his fingers and dancing in the pit.

"Master," he cried, "it is perfect, not a bubble, not a flaw!" He put his hands out to the hot piece as if he would embrace it.

"It's amazing," agreed the governor's agent. He turned to Loaga. "Why didn't you want me to see this?"

The head-man shrugged his shoulders,

"It is a head—"

"But, my heavens, what a head!" cried Mogglesby in eulogy; and then, more practically, he added. "It's sculpture. It's made of what—bronze? What earthly objection could any man have to sculpture?"

Loaga lifted his hands as if this were beyond him.

Sammu was charmed.

"Master, come to the house of Mumbo. I will show you some wonderful heads."

Loaga began a hurried discouragement of this plan, but Sammu, with the



enthusiasm of an artist, already had leaped out of the pit and led the way to the great house beyond the furnace.

Mogglesby followed him and presently was in a great single malodorous room which was evidently a lodge room of some sort. At the farther end was a raised dais and drums on each side. In the center arose a grotesque idol of heroic size, crudely carved out of wood. In front of this idol, ranged along the edge of the dais, stood a long row of exquisitely done bronze heads of Negroes and gorillas. Each piece stood on its neck, without the faintest suggestion of shoulders, and faced the great fantastic idol. The revolting smell, the beautifully done bronzes and the crude carving of the central piece formed a sort of riddle for the Englishman.

He turned to Loaga and asked him the meaning of the odor. Sammu answered—

"Mumbo lives on the odor of the departed men; but when we put the real heads on his altar, the scent became too strong for human beings, so we molded them in bronze and poured the blood on the ground for the odor."

Of a sudden the Englishman realized that the heads he saw were not sculpture at all, but death masks. The particular head he had seen cast doubtless came from the headless body he and his party had found that morning.

He stood regarding the semicircle with a painful feeling of the wholesale murder it involved. He turned to Loaga and asked the dignified black man to conduct him to the hut set apart for him.

"I want to have a talk with you about this," he told the head-man. "Now each one of those bronzes represents some one killed and eaten by the M'Bembi, doesn't it?"

"Master," began the black man, "I don't remember each one—"

"You don't have to remember each one," snapped the white man, putting his handkerchief to his nose. "I'm talking about how they were all done."

The head-man said nothing as the two turned out into the night again. When they were once more in the street Mogglesby was about to begin his homily when his attention was attracted by a torchlight procession entering the village gate. Drums began to beat with the involved rhythm of African drummers on the march. *Rum-tidy-dum-dum-rum-tidy-dy-dy-dum!* The black phalanx came down the village alley, swaying to the tempo and bristling with *assegais*. As they drew near Mogglesby heard a white man's voice proclaiming:

"Ho, men of the Baloongas, his Excellency the governor's agent has arrived! Make way for the governor's agent!"

And then Mogglesby saw the diminutive form of the doctor leading the procession with Jolo the guard as head-man, and on the other side, the gloomy Mokato with his earplates missing, fingering his empty ear lobes as he marched.

As the procession came past, the doctor saw his superior in front of the lodge house and drew up in some confusion.

"Mr. Mogglesby," he said, "we looked for you everywhere outside. I had an idea it might—you know—give us—er—standing to make something of an entry."

"It may help," agreed Mogglesby, looking at his satellite. "Where were you going?"

"The truth is we're going into this lodge room," explained the doctor. "You see I know something of the signals and rites of the M'Bembi and tonight I'm to be made a full-fledged member."

"The devil you are," ejaculated the big Englishman in astonishment.

"Yes, you see you're the government here now, and I'm your man. I thought it would be very handy for you to keep in touch with the secret society through one of your own men. I talked it over with Mokato. He said he would propose me. We thought it was his duty in a way."

The black man with the empty ear lobes nodded slowly to the idea.

"By George, it is an idea," agreed Mogglesby, surprised at this outcome in his satellite. "You can go ahead with it."

The little man signaled the drummers. The *rum-tidy-dum-dum* broke out afresh and the procession with the doctor at its head marched into the huge malodorous house of the idol.

Loaga, the head-man, went hurriedly with Mogglesby to the hut that had been set aside for the Englishman. He lighted a coconut oil lamp for his guest, indicated a woven mat with a panther skin laid over it for a bed and then hurried back to the lodge room himself.

The coconut oil lamp made some light and some smoke of a rather pleasant odor. Outside, the drums in the noisome idol house filled the night with their pulse. Mogglesby lighted a cigaret at the coconut flame, then sat down on the skin bed to think over the queer position in which he found himself.

The mixture of Negro heads and gorilla heads around the dais in front of the idol gave Mogglesby a strange impression. It renewed the fact in his mind that the black men believed the animals could talk. His own experience with *Luomo* suggested some truth in this theory.

Now as he sat watching the guttering of his lamp, the possibility that the great simians were a kind of people with a rudimentary language and were moved by erotic impulses toward the Baloonga women not only touched him with amazement but filled him with a kind of vague horror. Presently he wondered at his own emotion. This horror was so nebulous, so reasonless that he fancied it must have come to him out of some enormously remote past.

His cigarette went out unnoticed as he sat musing on it and presently the strange fancy came to him that once, perhaps, his own far distant ancestors stood in the same position as these present-day Baloongas. The Baloongagorilla warfare must be a replica of the far-off strife when the Cro-Magnons found and exterminated the Neanderthal men in southern Europe.

And in the Cro-Magnon blood, in Mogglesby's own blood, still lingered the horror of animalish countenances and neckless shoulders that had saved his forebears from mating with and losing their human identity in a cruder species of sub-human animals.

The Englishman's odd reverie was broken into by the pad of a naked foot outside his hut. Then a black man slipped softly into his door with two round

plate-like stones in his hands. He stood for a moment blinking his eyes in the light, then saw Mogglesby and said—

"I thought you were asleep, brother."

"No, I was sitting here smoking. What do you want, Mokato?"

"Brother Mogglesby," said the black man seriously, "the M'Bembi are going on a great hunt for the wood-men."

"Yes, so I understand."

"They want to attack the wood-men now so the wood-men won't come and ruin their banana fields and steal their girls."

"Do they expect the gorillas to do this?" asked Mogglesby curiously.

"Oh, yes, they will do that after the M'Bembi have killed one of the wood-men."

"Then just what did you want to ask me?"

"I was thinking about going on the hunt myself, Brother Mogglesby. Do you think Brother Spence would approve of killing and eating a wood-man?"

"Why, of course he would, Mokato," declared the Englishman roundly. "What's the difference between a gorilla and any other noxious animal."

"You don't think the commandment to return good for evil applies to wood-men, brother?"

"Listen, Mokato," said Mogglesby. "That commandment really applies only inside of a race or a nation, much less to the whole animal kingdom. For example, I'm an Englishman. If another Englishman came along and treated me shabbily, I might do him a favor afterward, but I wouldn't act that way by a Turk. A Turk would have to come clean. Now, of course, the animals are nowhere at all. Go on and hunt. My heavens, I used to hunt foxes with a bishop."

"A bishop!" cried the black man.

"Why certainly, certainly, Mokato. Come right down to it, Christ was a very reasonable fellow; he hardly asks a Christian to give up the sport of hunting. But, here's the point—draw a line between eating gorillas and eating men."

The fact that a bishop had gone fox hunting seemed to impress Mokato. He began inserting the round plates of stone in his empty ear lobes. After some frowning he got them in and swung his head with the satisfaction a white man feels in evening wear. Then he asked Mogglesby if he could leave his shirt and trousers in his hut.

The Englishman was complaisant and Mokato finished his full dress by taking off his clothes and donning a breech clout. After he had completed his toilet, Mokato straightened himself as if he felt freer. He made a lithe, serious bow to the white man on the skin,

"God be with you, brother," he said, and took himself out into the night.

When Mokato had gone, Mogglesby blew out his lamp and fell into a nightmarish sleep—for how long a period the Englishman did not know. All sorts of hallucinations floated through his head.

He thought he was standing in the idol house and all of the gorilla heads came alive and began protesting their fate in horrible voices. Then he

dreamed the monkey-like Sammu had come to him and wanted to make a cast of Mogglesby's own head. He thought the wizened black man had pleaded with him for his head with an artist's zeal. It was a big head, he thought Sammu was saying . . . a lion-like head—Here a movement in the dark hut awakened the sleeper.

Mogglesby lay still and really did see in the door of his hut a small wizened figure outlined against the gray light of dawn. A sudden honest concern for his head came over the white man.

Without arising, he swung his body silently around with his hands, made a long noiseless reach and clamped the ankle of the little man in the door.

"Sammu," he snapped, "what the hell do you mean coming in here?"

The little man shrieked, tried to kick loose, then collapsed, wailing and shuddering.

"Oh, my God! The devil's got me! Oh—is that you, Mr. Mogglesby?"

"Yes," ejaculated the big man in surprise. "What's the matter with you, Doctor?"

"Why, you grabbed me, sir," shivered the little man.

"Good heavens, that's not enough to shake you all to pieces, yelling and trembling like that."

"I—I'm afraid I was a little unstrung, sir." The small man reached down and rubbed his ankle. "Your grip is like a steel cutter."

Of a sudden Mogglesby recalled that the little doctor had just finished his initiation into the M'Bembi.

"Oh, I see," observed the big man. "Something got on your nerves last night."

"Well, no, not exactly."

"Why did you come in here?"

"I—I didn't want to sleep by myself, sir."

"Well, by Jove," ejaculated Mogglesby, moving back on his bed and mutely inviting the doctor to remain, "something must have upset you."

"No—not that, sir. It's getting on toward morning and I thought I'd drop in here and get a few minutes' sleep before breakfast—" here the doctor hesitated and added in a queer tone—"breakfast—breakfast—my Gawd, will I ever eat breakfast again?"

The Englishman looked curiously at his little satellite through the gray blur of morning.

"Doctor, what in the devil happened to you last night?" Then he added in a lighter tone, "Come now, you are to be my liaison man, you know."

"Well, I went with Mokato and Loaga."

"Where is Mokato?"

"Mokato—he—he went home from where we—ate, Mr. Mogglesby," stammered the little man.

"Oh, I see, you helped eat a gorilla," said the Englishman with a twinge of disgust. "Well, it must have been messy from what I saw."

"You mustn't call it that, Mr. Mogglesby," protested the small man earnestly. "You never notice the—" he broke off with a shiver and settled down

not far from the big man's bed, evidently to sleep, or at least to rest after the ordeal of his initiation.

Mogglesby sat pondering this nervous outbreak in his small ratlike companion. That something strange and shocking had happened to the little man was obvious. As he wondered about it, the light grew clearer in the hut and presently he saw a small bundle of clothes lying near the entrance where Mokato had left them the preceding night. At the sight of the garments a gruesome suspicion leaped into Mogglesby's head. He leaned over and touched the figure near him.

At first touch the doctor snapped to a sitting posture, chattering,

"What is it? What's the matter?"

"Look here," demanded Mogglesby, shaking him awake. "Where is Mokato?"

"Mokato—Mokato—" he began to shiver. "Why, I told you he had gone home to his village."

"But I know he hasn't," snapped the Englishman. "There are his clothes. Look here, Doctor, do you mean that you and those black devils—"

Mogglesby paused, staring in the faint light at the little man.

The doctor stared back and suddenly broke into a rush of shaking words:

"Mr. Mogglesby, God knows I've never seen such a night in all my life. Everybody started out with *assegais*. They gave me one. We walked and walked, single file through the jungle. Then we came to a burned place in the brush and we all began dancing around a fire. I knew there wasn't any wood-man there. Then I knew it was going to be somebody in the ring."

"All of a sudden, sir, the jungle took on the queerest look. I wondered if it was going to be me. It was like a poker game screwed up a million times. The skin crawled on my back. I could feel myself knocked on the head. Then I hoped maybe it wasn't me, and all the rest of us was hoping maybe it wasn't him, and dancing around. Then all at once Loaga jumped out in the center of the ring and shouts, 'Brothers, I hear Mumbo calling!' And somebody yells back, 'Calling who?' and not knowing whether it would be their own name or not. And the head-man calls Mokato and levels his *assegai*.

"Well, Mokato's eyes bulged. He lifted his spear, then yells out, 'Brother Spence! Brother Spence!' and whirls to run. To see him getting away was the awfulest shock I ever felt. Everybody flung their *assegais*. So did I. I knew if it wasn't him it would be somebody else. Maybe me. My spear went between his legs. But a lot went clear through him and stuck out on the other side like a pin cushion. He stumbled down, dropping his own *assegai* and flinging up his hands. When he hit the ground one of his ear-plates bounced out. He wiggled a time or two when Sammu ran up and cut off his head. The little Negro was particular about how it was cut off. He wrapped it up in green palm leaves.

"Then everybody piled dead grass and dead wood over the body and set it afire. Then we danced around the fire and Loaga chanted out,

"'Brothers, Mokato was a strong man.'"

And the others sang back—

" 'Aye, aye, strong was Mokato!' "  
"And the head-man chanted—  
" 'Mokato was a noble man.' "  
"And the rest of us sang back—  
" 'Aye, aye, noble was Mokato.' "  
"And the head-man sings—  
" 'Mokato gives his strength to his brothers.' "  
"And we sings it back, and it went on like that, Governor, all of us shaky inside that it wasn't us lying there in the fire. Feeling grateful that Mokato was it and not us. Then we raked off the fire—"  
"Hush! My God, that's enough!" cried Mogglesby.  
The doctor ceased talking while the big man stared at him in horror.  
"Doctor, what in God's name ever possessed you?"  
"Mr. Mogglesby, it isn't what you think it is," cried the doctor in a sort of anguish to make him understand. "There's something about it, that—that lifts a man up—it makes him realize his—his comrades are brothers—My God, I can't explain it—"  
Mogglesby got to his feet, walked widely around the doctor and went out the door of the hut.

In the early dawn the Baloonga village still slept.  
The big Englishman moved down the village street with the doctor's narrative still shuddering in his mind. There was a kind of childish feel to the account which gave it a tang of unreality. The whole thing seemed a game. But the Englishman suddenly realized that the games of children were the far off reproductions of exactly these cannibalistic orgies.

What was the meaning of childish burying in leaves, of building bonfires and leaping through the flames, of shrieking flights to escape the child who was "it"? What was the meaning of all this except the timeless handing down of such rites in the games of children from an immemorial past? The very fact that the doctor's narrative had seemed childish was proof of its verity.

Mogglesby moved up the village street with a painful feeling of immediate responsibility for this remote survival. A Frenchman, an American, might have considered the problem with considerable abstract interest, but with the Englishman it was a personal affair which he must rectify; and that is why tiny England governs so much of the globe.

In the gray light, Mogglesby saw a renewed smoke arising from Sammu's furnace. As he drew closer he saw the pit was empty, but a new ball of clay sat in the corner. He looked at the thing. It gave him a turn. Then he walked on with an impulse twitching through his powerful body to reach out and brush away the whole abomination of the Baloonga village.

At some distance down the street began the first noise of the day, the pounding of barley in a see-saw pestle.

Mogglesby could see a black girl lifting and drawing down a stone which was attached by a rope to a beam like a well lift overhead. The white man regarded her with loathing as the future mother of cannibals. He went

her and asked which was Loaga's hut. The girl stopped her pounding and pointed it out.

Mogglesby strode to the entry, brushed aside the curtain and called sharply:

"Loaga! Loaga!"

In the dark interior he heard the head-man swing abruptly out of sleep into a defensive posture without that interim of yawning and blinking common to civilizees.

The blade of Loaga's *assegai* appeared in the doorway, then above it the black head, thick lips and pendulous earplates.

"What is it, master?" asked the black man, peering up and down the palisade around the village. "Are the wood-men upon us?"

"Where is Mokato?" asked the Englishman in a hard voice.

"Mokato—Mokato is dead. Last night we found a wood-man and before we could spear him, he killed Mokato."

Somehow the simplicity of the lie infuriated Mogglesby.

"Loaga, Mokato's head is in the pit wrapped in clay this moment."

The head-man stood blinking his eyes.

"Is that why you wakened me? I thought the wood-men were attacking our village."

Mogglesby's wrath paused a moment in its flight to inquire sharply—

"Why did you think that?"

"Because we did eat a wood-man the other night," said Loaga, admitting what he had done the preceding evening.

"Would that cause them to attack?"

"Certainly." Loaga nodded and wagged his earplates. "The wood-men know that the Baloongas have taken the dead wood-man's strength."

"Well, that's neither here nor there. Don't you know I will have to report Mokato's murder to the governor at Ghandis!"

"Murder, master!" cried the head-man.

"What else can you call it?"

"It was the sacrifice of one man that his brothers might live!"

"What in the hell has Mokato's death got to do with you living?" cried Mogglesby.

"Master," cried Loaga, loosing his *assegai* to gesticulate, "you know when the brothers of the M'Bembi eat a strong man they share his strength between them. That is natural. A man is what he eats! Take Mokato, a strong brave man. Mokato's heart is in me now!" Loaga struck his chest a sharp blow. "I am afraid of nothing."

For a moment Mogglesby was about to tell the head-man that the chemical composition of his body had little reference to the sort of meat he ate, but he knew such an argument would be wasted. So he came down to orders.

"Look here, Loaga," he said. "I came down here from Ghandis to stop cannibalism. Then for the whole village to march off on the very evening I arrive and eat the man who guided me here—what in the hell will the governor think of that?"

The big man reached out and gave Loaga's arm a shake. At the pressure the head-man twisted and beads of sweat broke out on his face.

"May a boa swallow me, but you might be a wood-man yourself, master," he grunted and stood caressing his bruised arm. "By Mumbo, your pinch shows how the Baloongas need courage to face the wood-men. How can we get it except through the broiled meat of brave men?"

The big Englishman turned away from the head-man and moved back down the street. For the Baloongas to hang their bravery and prowess in hunting gorillas on cannibalism; the idiocy of the custom bit at Mogglesby's nerves. Again he thought of bringing down English soldiers and wiping out the whole village; murdering them *en masse* because they insisted on murdering one another singly. That seemed right to Mogglesby.

His thoughts were interrupted by the continued pounding down the street. The thoroughfare was still wrapped in gray shadows. The girl and her well sweep pestle formed a charcoal study against the stake wall that surrounded the village. She wore only a skirt of grass about her loins and her slender body lifted and fell to the rhythm of her work.

The white man walked on, pondering what he must do to stamp out the curse of the Baloongas when this was flung from his thoughts by the barley girl venting a wild shriek. The end of the pestle sweep banged to the ground. The next moment Mogglesby saw the girl flying for a hut, screaming as if demented. Then he saw a big shadowy form run along the top of the staked fence. It made a long simian leap to the ground and flashed after the girl with horrible speed.

The huge Englishman dashed at the thing, bellowing for Loaga at the top of his lungs. The next instant the simian had the girl around the waist and was scuttling back to the staked fence, bearing a hideous resemblance to a great hairy spider with a fly.

Mogglesby sprinted forward. As he went, he stooped, seized a stone and flung it with a stiff arm, like a cricket bowler. He prayed God he would miss the girl. And the missile did thud against the broad back of the simian just above the buttocks. Its bounds broke down into a scrambling shuffle. The thing flung a glance backward over its high shoulders and must have seen the Englishman on top of him and a dozen black men with *assegais* just behind, for suddenly it dropped the girl, and went up the stakes at a swift hand-over-hand ascent, whipped its body to the other side and dropped just as a half dozen spears plunked into the top of the stockade.

Negroes and white man went flying pell-mell for the gate and dashed around to the place where the gorilla had taken the wall. Sure enough, they saw it shuffling off toward the banana field.

The Baloongas flew after it with poised spears, yelling and howling. The animal came to bay immediately in front of a heavy curtain of banana leaves and made its stand. There was something horribly human in its fangs and sunken eyes and enormous reach. It started back at the warriors. The Baloongas dashed up within ten feet of the monster and let fly their spears. The devilish looking thing roared, tried to tear out the blades that impaled



him, fell forward; and at the same moment the banana leaves were suddenly swept aside and a gang of gorillas leaped out on the sparsely armed Baloon-gas.

The sight almost paralyzed Mogglesby; such a multiplication of fiends. The unarmed men dashed behind comrades who still held spears. The guard Jolo was caught as the black men retreated. The Negro screamed as if from the grates of hell. Mogglesby turned, made a mad rush at the brute breaking Jolo's body. He struck the great ape on its small, close set ear and it went over. The next moment Jolo and the white man dashed for the cover of the collecting *assegaïs* and the anthropoids were afraid to follow. Their attack was over. In an instant they had vanished among the banana leaves. The battlefield became silent save for the rustle of some frond as the gorillas made for the dense jungle beyond.

The gorilla which had attacked the girl and which had received the spears was dead.

As the warriors turned back to the village they met Luomo, who came running toward them.

"Did you kill a wood-man?"

Some black man called out yes and pointed in the direction of the body.

"Listen," called the woman. "Did he have a gray patch on the side of his head?"

"May a snake crush me, Luomo!" cried the warrior. "Do you think we were looking at the wood-man's hair when we killed him?"

Luomo dashed on past the spearmen to the dead gorilla making the strangest throatiest sounds Mogglesby had ever heard from a human larynx.

The woman merely glanced at the dead simian, than ran on, lifting her strange animal-like cry in the jungle.

When the warriors had reentered the stockade they gathered around the place where the simian had attacked the girl and stared at it with that human feeling that something strange and precious inhered in the mere locale of the drama. They picked up the stone Mogglesby had flung at the gorilla and were amazed at its weight. And they talked about the Englishman's blow that had saved Jolo; or rather the remnants of Jolo, for the guard was badly torn.

The Englishman evidently had leaped up in the estimation of the tribesmen. He had reached that great height of admiration accorded by primitive people to extremely strong men. The man had dashed at a gorilla and knocked him over. And they hefted again the stone the governor's agent had flung. It weighed perhaps fifty pounds.

Mogglesby himself was lost in a maze of thought at the conduct of this sortie. Was the gorilla which he had struck with a stone actually wounded, or had it pretended to be crippled to draw the warriors into an ambushade? And at the crux had that wood-man voluntarily received the *assegaïs* in his body to disarm the blacks for the assault of the hidden gorillas?

The more the white man thought of it the more impossible it appeared that it all came about by chance. The wood-men had conducted a strategic

but an unarmed attack on the village. Then if they really could talk—if old Luomo could talk to the simians—

The governor's agent hunted up Loaga again and interrogated him about the woman.

"Why, of course she can talk to them, master," said the head-man. "She was gone five years among them and when she came back she could not speak one word of the Baloonga language, so of course she spoke the wood-men language."

"Oh, is that what you base it on!" cried Mogglesby, relieved. "She had forgot her own language, so she must know the gorilla language?"

"Master, a woman must know some language," ejaculated the head-man, mildly astonished that his logic did not convince the white man.

But the very pleasure with which Mogglesby pounced upon and discarded this negative proof finally disturbed the Englishman. Why was he so upset at the evidence of a planned attack and a military sacrifice among the anthropoids? Why was he so pleased to think they had no language? Why did he so keenly desire to believe them to be dumb, irresponsible beasts? An answer, a reply filled with a vague uneasiness, limned itself obscurely in his mind and then faded out before the white man really could catch his own still-born explanation. He did not know why he felt this silent horror and enmity to the anthropoids.

That night the doctor came to sleep in Mogglesby's hut again. The two fell to talking in that complete moral inequality which is assumed on one side and admitted on the other. It was a basis from which the dirt could talk to the clouds.

"There's not a bit of doubt in my mind that the wood-men can talk," the doctor was saying. "They are bound to talk to plan what they did to-day."

"They may have used gestures," objected Mogglesby in weak defense.

"What difference would that make—talking with the hands instead of the tongue?"

And staring into the flame of the coconut oil lamp, Mogglesby's plan suddenly leaped in to consciousness.

"Look here, Doctor," he said slowly. "If those gorillas can talk and plan, we've got to make peace with them."

The little man twisted around in amazement.

"What, Governor!"

"Listen," said Mogglesby. "If gorillas can think and plan they are at a point where the human race lingered for hundreds of thousands of years."

The little man scratched his head.

"Well, what if they are?"

"Suppose the human race gave the gorillas a chance, what sort of folk would they make if they were let alone?"

"Why, I don't know," said the doctor.

"Of course you don't. You can't possibly imagine it." The big man sat staring at the flame of the coconut oil and presently said, "I think we

ought to make peace with them, if there's any way to do it. I think we ought to let them go on—"

"Mr. Mogglesby," cried the doctor, "how can you hope to make a treaty with—monkeys?"

"We can try it," declared the governor's agent. "If they can talk as Luomo says they can, why not try it? Besides that, Doctor, it's a kind of duty."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, if they can think and talk and plan and fight, just how much more would it take to make a kind of people?"

"That's what the Baloongas think," said the little man.

"There you are. If we consider them as a people, I've got to look after them, Doctor. They're on English territory—under the English flag."

The little man straightened.

"By Jove, I hadn't thought of that!"

"If they're people, they're people," repeated Mogglesby, "and it's up to us."

The two English *lazzaroni* sat brooding by the coconut oil lamp in the jungles of West Africa, trying to decide on England's duty to a sub-human phylum.

They were interrupted by a sudden shrieking of women. Both men leaped up and dashed out into the night. The uproar was down the street, and Baloonga men were gathering with torches. When Mogglesby reached the place he found a black circle around two women fighting. They had each other by the hair in feminine fashion and each was shrieking for the other one to turn loose.

It was a full-bodied woman and a girl. The men stood watching and laughing at this battle, but Mogglesby stepped in and undid their clutching hands. When he straightened them up he was surprised to see Luomo and the girl whom the gorilla had attacked.

"Luomo," ejaculated the Englishman, "what's the matter? What do you—"

"I'll teach that girl to be pounding barley when she knows the wood-men are about!" cried Luomo in a rage.

"I wasn't thinking about the wood-men!" flung back the girl, weeping.

"I know you were. What were you out so early for?"

"My father needed cakes for breakfast," shrilled the maiden.

"You're not in the habit of getting up so early to pound barley cakes for your father!"

Mogglesby interposed.

"Go to your hut and stay there, Geelee," he said to the girl; then he turned to Luomo. "You come with me. Did you ever find the wood-men today?"

The woman moved sulkily at the side of the governor's agent; presently she grumbled out—

"You know that girl, Geelee, was pounding to make a big racket when she knew the wood-men were around."

And it suddenly occurred to Mogglesby that the universal subordination and cloistering of women originated far back in the history of the race to prevent them from attracting males of lower or different species. No doubt the whole progress of humanity from ape to man depended upon the women being kept in caves that were sealed up with enormous stones. It was a thoroughly English notion. No American would ever have thought of such a thing.

When the two Englishmen had Luomo in their own hut they entered at once on their project. They asked her again if she had found the wood-men and this time she admitted she had. Well, could she lead Mogglesby to the wood-men?

She could try. She knew where the wood-men stayed, but sometimes they went away.

Well, if she should ask the wood-men not to kill Mogglesby would it be possible for the Englishman to go into the land of the hairy men and make a peace between them and the Baloongas?

"Why do you want to do that, master?" inquired the woman, amazed.

"Because as long as the Baloongas fight the wood-men, they will eat the wood-men; and as long as they eat wood-men, they will eat men. If I can stop one I can stop it all."

"Master," pondered the old woman shrewdly, "if they made peace would the wood-men stop stealing the Baloonga girls?"

"Certainly," said Mogglesby. "That has been the cause of war between men and nations since time began."

There was a great deal more talk between the two. The governor's agent wanted to know whether there was some wood-man who had authority to make a treaty for the others. Luomo hesitated, then said there was. The Englishman asked who. The black woman beat about the bush, saying vaguely there was always some monkey in control of the others.

"Well, look here," objected Mogglesby, beginning to suspect from her manner that this whole matter of talking gorillas was apocryphal. "If you don't know which one is in command, if you can't pick him out—"

"Oh, I can pick him out!" cried the woman.

"How can you if you don't know which one—"

"I do know," insisted the black woman gloomily. "He is Keckechech."

"Keckechech!"

"Yes, that's his name."

"Why did you hem and haw about it so?" inquired the white man, still regarding her doubtfully.

Just then Mogglesby saw the doctor frowning and shaking his head and winking. This somehow in its turn annoyed the big man.

"Well, what have you got to say about it?" he inquired of the little man.

The doctor ejaculated—

"Oh, nothing, nothing."

He got up from where he was sitting on the floor of the hut, whistled an

aimless note or two, then apparently as he was about to walk out the door he paused at Mogglesby's side and whispered in a tone evidently to be concealed from Luomo—

"Don't press the point, sir. It is an affair of the heart."

"A what?"

"This Keckeche was Luomo's husband, sir, among the gorillas, and he turned her out, sir, got a divorce in a way, and naturally, being a monkey, without alimony, sir."

"How did you learn this?" asked Mogglesby in the same tone, although both must have been overheard by the woman herself.

"Loaga told me, sir."

"I see—well—um . . ."

And he made arrangements to start with old Luomo on the following morning.

The doctor wanted to arrange a parade of the M'Bembi to see the governor's agent off. The doctor was now an officer in the brotherhood and the emblem of his office was three rooster feathers tied to the shaft of his *assegai*.

Mogglesby, however, declined the invitation.

Mogglesby walked behind the black woman, African fashion, in the profound gloom of the jungle. At long distances apart, when a ray of sunlight did fall unobstructed into the rank growth, it burned like a lamp in the darkness.

The white man said almost nothing to his companion. The fancy came to him that for millenniums the animals must have pursued their way in silence save for a passing grunt or growl, but their intellectual silence must have been complete. For millenniums no living thing made any mental comment on the world around it. Leaves had no reference to the trees. There were no seasons, no directions, neither heat nor cold but instead brute discomforts. Without words the universe shattered into surfaces and sounds of utter disconnection.

In the midst of these musings Luomo looked back and held up a finger at the white man. A kind of tautening went through the Englishman's nerves at the culmination of this fantastic expedition.

"Do you see them?" he asked, peering through the green gloom.

For answer the woman filled her heavy bosom and emitted the peculiar animalish cry that Mogglesby had heard before.

At the sound a queer thing happened. What seemed to be a liana swinging from a teak tree curled upward in great swift loops and lost itself in the upper chambers of the teak.

The thing sent a shiver along the white man's nerves.

"What made it get away like that?" he queried, peering up into the twilight of the tree.

"I made the cry of a wood-man, master; the boa is afraid of the wood-men. Every creature knows what to strike and what to avoid."

The Englishman followed the black woman gingerly under the teak.

He sensed in his spine that a boa constrictor was looped somewhere in the limbs overhead.

When Mogglesby was clear of the tree and could dismiss the quiver from his nerves a queer idea entered his head. Man, through his technical superiority, had lost his citizenship in the animal world. Lions, boas, primates must be aware of a certain personality in one another.

They would be like armed and equal powers subject to tacit treaties such as evidently obtained between the constrictors and the gorillas. And here was Mogglesby set out on the bizarre errand of renewing man's citizenship in the archaic society of animals.

A distant ululation in the jungle interrupted the white man's Buddha-like reverie. Old Luomo answered it with her peculiar deep-lunged call. Then she turned toward Mogglesby and nodded. She called again and two or three of the inhuman cries answered from different directions. At the heavy grating sounds, a weird feeling came over Mogglesby. He seemed to be sinking through layers of life into utter simplicities.

He felt that if he descended into the simian world he might move downward through quadrupeds, fish, vermes, into the motionless peace of the very trees themselves—into the silence of the loam. And Mogglesby realized that for the first time in his life he had felt the premonition of death.

A great banyan lorded it over the jungle with a hundred columns, and among the complexity of its boles Mogglesby glimpsed the movement of the shambling, neckless wood-men.

The black woman stationed the man at some distance from the banyan and approached alone. The Englishman watched her go in trepidation, but Luomo went up to the banyan with the freedom of habit. And as if to give the white man's nerves a final twist she vanished in its chambers of leaves.

There arose inside the queer gibbering and chattering which Mogglesby had come to know. He kept his place, listening intently, trying to make out some of the regularities of a language, but it sounded as hopeless a blur as French sounds to an American. He could distinguish the black woman's lighter voice with its human overtones among an animal gibbering, but that was all.

Presently with rather a shock the Englishman saw an exodus of gorillas from the banyan. They hurried away walking on their short legs and long arms, but somehow not conveying an idea of flight. Luomo appeared out of the banyan leaves and gesticulated for Mogglesby to approach.

What had happened the white man could not imagine. He went forward curiously, paused just outside the vast tent of the banyan, then saw Luomo inside and entered. The tree seemed deserted. It held the peculiar effect of dreaming characteristic of trees in a perfectly still air.

"Why did they all go away?" the white man asked the woman in a hushed tone.

"So you could come up, master," answered the woman simply. "They saw you were afraid, so they went away."

A queer sensation of having been understood where he did not under-

stand went over Mogglesby, and in the silence it occurred to him that there might be modes of perception without the use of words—even the dreaming banyan—he interrupted his own musing to ask.

"Why should I come up if they are all gone?"

For answer Luomo made her clacking sound again, and then said—

"He will come down as slowly as he can, master, so as not to startle you."

A slight noise overhead caused the Englishman to look up and, at some distance up in the branches, the governor's agent saw a huge man-like thing gazing down at him. It was vast and gray, and its fangs and wide nostrils and cavernous eyes and the peaked ears suggested a ferocity and fiendishness beyond anything imaginable. The mere fact that the gorilla was descending, as Luomo had said, very slowly, gave the white man, not a feeling of safety, but a sense of being crept down on, of being stalked by some devil.

The thing seemed a thousand times worse than the impersonal coils of the boa; there was something human, something intimate and demoniacal about it. And even amid the cold horror it evoked, through Mogglesby's mind flickered the reason for this profound revulsion; his far-off ancestors had fought creatures such as this for millenniums before they established their human supremacy. The whole idea of devils is based on some closely related sub-human species of the animal race.

"This is—" here Luomo made a simian sound which can be approximately rendered by the syllables "Kekechex." "This is Kekechex," she said, "the wood-man who leaped over the stockade of my village five years ago and who brought me here."

The white man looked at the woman, then back at the monster and imagined the horror of such an ordeal.

"Does he remember doing that?" asked Mogglesby, under the prevailing human impression that animals have very short memories or none at all.

The black woman turned back to the thing and uttered a queer barking. The simian chattered in return. Then apparently some sort of misunderstanding arose between them, for Luomo replied with a sharper tongue, which provoked more chatter from the gorilla. Presently Mogglesby broke into the dialogue.

"Well, does he remember it?" he inquired again.

The black woman turned to the white man with the protruding lips of an angry Baloonga.

"He says of course he remembers the follies of his youth. He's calling me a folly of his youth!"

A wrinkle of humor crept into the fantastic interview for the Englishman, but this allayed all doubt in Mogglesby's mind that the black woman's questions and answers were authentic. He looked up at old Kekechex and suddenly the gorilla ceased to be sheer monster. It was such a human thing to do—steal a woman, live with her until the years extinguished the flames of his desire and then suddenly decide that all women are follies—quite like any old valetudinarian in a Fifth Avenue club.

Mogglesby did not press his personal curiosity further. It was quite evident

that all life, whether monkey or man, went through the stages of attraction and repulsion, desire and cynicism. He came to the real point of his mission.

"Ask him," he requested of Luomo, "why the wood-men destroy the bananas in the Baloonga fields when they have plenty of fruit in the jungle."

The woman and the wood-man made more barking and chattering sounds and finally she translated that it was because the Baloongas killed and ate wood-men.

"That," replied Mogglesby, "is because the wood-men carry away the Baloonga girls."

More chattering, and finally old Luomo was irritated again before she finally translated—

"Keckechex asks how is it possible to prevent young men from falling into the follies of youth."

"Look here," ejaculated Mogglesby sharply. "It's all very well for an old dried up stick to hang in a tree and disapprove folly in general. Tell him the war between the Baloongas and the wood-men is also folly and I have come here looking for enough wisdom to stop it."

This sufficiently stirred the cynicism of the oldest wood-man to make him ask how was it possible for the world to go on unless the men continued to carry off the women.

At this answer a kind of dismay went through Mogglesby. He saw the wood-men accepted the *assegais* of the Negroes as a sort of natural hazard to mating with Baloonga women. The same custom obtained among nearly all primitive people.

"Would it not be possible," ventured the white man, "for you to compel the young wood-men to leave the Baloonga girls alone?"

To this Keckechex chattered a negative. He said in the mating season the young wood-men went everywhere. They asked no one. They were not afraid. And when they captured a wood-girl or a Baloonga girl they brought her to the banyan.

By this time the creature above him had ceased to be an animal to Mogglesby. A coherence ran through the replies, and the governor's agent had hope of bringing about some sort of understanding after all.

"How would this do?" he suggested. "Could you order the young wood-men to leave the Baloonga girls alone, and if they did bring one to the banyan, you could make them take her back to the village?"

When Luomo translated this to the oldest man of the simians the gray creature pondered, lifted a hand-like foot to scratch his thigh; finally he said—

"Would that not be an infringement upon the natural liberty of all living things to mate with whom they pleased?"

"That may be," agreed Mogglesby with some warmth, "but wouldn't it be worth your while to do a little infringing if it kept the wood-men out of war with the Baloongas?"

Keckechex scratched his head with a foot-like hand—



"Why should one wood-man stop chasing the Baloonga girls on account of other wood-men than himself?"

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Mogglesby. "Out of public spirit, out of patriotism!"

The creature in the tree became puzzled.

"Public spirit, patriotism—what are those things?"

Here began a long dissertation by the Englishman attempting to explain to Kekechex, through Luomo, the meaning of the altruistic emotions. But the oldest wood-man became lost in a maze of reasoning. The whole idea of patriotism and altruism was incomprehensible to him. Finally he chattered out in bewilderment:

"Why should one wood-man deny himself pleasure in order that other wood-men may be safe. It is absurd, unthinkable. What connection is there between one wood-man and another wood-man?"

"Listen," cried Mogglesby. "When the gorillas last attacked the Baloonga village, one of them gave his life so his comrades might win the battle."

"He did nothing of the sort," chattered Kekechex. "He gave his life hoping to kill a Baloonga!"

"All right, damn it, all right, take it on those grounds then! If the young wood-men will return the Baloonga girls to the village perhaps the very young wood-man who does so will be saved from war and danger. There you are; each gorilla is working for his own hide and to the devil with the others!"

The creature in the banyan pondered this and finally agreed that it was true. He then stipulated that he would have the Baloonga girls returned provided the Baloongas themselves would cease killing and eating other men.

Mogglesby was on the point of agreeing to this when he began to think more carefully of what he was trafficking away. It occurred to him that in conflicts for mastery between two sub-human species victory would always lean toward the group which practiced cannibalism and human sacrifice. The cannibals would always believe they could absorb the strength and cunning of their enemies and this would bring a distinct psychological advantage. Further, the feeling that a man's life had been given for their own would hold them together by its drama and pathos.

Moreover, out of this drama and pathos would bloom the spirit of patriotism and self-sacrifice which had been so entirely lacking in the monkeys. Indeed, Kekechex could not even understand what the terms meant. These thoughts brought a sudden reversal of values to Mogglesby. For moral stagnation perhaps nothing could be more deadly than the even peaceful fruit-eating lives of the monkeys. It grew upon Mogglesby that perhaps cannibalism and blood sacrifice were the foundation stones upon which all human civilizations had been built.

The simian made a drop and the next moment was hanging to a lower limb by a foot and an arm. He chattered at Luomo and the woman said he wanted to know Mogglesby's decision.

"Tell him," said Mogglesby, "that I can't do it. Tell him I see only one

way to end the perpetual strife between the wood-men and the Baloongas."

"What way?" jabbered the oldest gorilla, lifting himself up on the limb from which he hung.

"Why should all the gorillas fight all the Baloongas?" queried the white man. "Why not let one contest settle the whole affair?"

"Who would contest?" asked the anthropoid.

"You select one gorilla to fight and let the Baloongas select one man to fight. Their battle would settle the question. If the wood-man wins, the Baloongas will move away and give land to wood-men. If the Baloonga wins, then the wood-men will go to some other part of the country beyond the mountains and disturb the Baloongas no more."

To get the gorilla to see this required a further long explanation. Since the gorillas had never practiced human sacrifice, the idea of a champion who would fight for his group and whose victory or defeat would settle the rights of his group lay completely outside the simian psychology. It caused Mogglesby to see more clearly than ever how necessary it was that cannibalism and human sacrifice enter into the foundation of every great civilization.

When the white man finally had conveyed his idea to the wood-man the question arose where the duel should be held. Keckechex desired the fight should be held in a tree. But Mogglesby pointed out that it would have to be held in a plain between the two armies, where all could see, if the contest was to have any symbolic value. This, of course, was self-evident the moment it was stated, so a savanna in the jungle about halfway between the banyan and the Baloonga village was selected as the dueling ground. The date of the contest was set for noon of the third day following; then Mogglesby and Luomo turned back through the jungle for home.

It was late at night before the two reached the village. The Baloongas came out *en masse* to hear the result of the strange expedition. When Mogglesby told them it was not peace but a single combat, the black men were in consternation. Who, they asked, could stand up alone against a wood-man?

Loaga, however, thought he saw a ruse in the plan. He suggested to Mogglesby that when all the gorillas were watching the fight the warriors could suddenly attack the wood-men and kill a great number of them.

"Listen, Loaga," said the white man sharply. "There will be a fight between one man and one gorilla and the victor wins the land for his people!"

Loaga was distressed,

"Then the Baloongas are lost," cried the head-man with a dismal shake of his head that swung his earplates. "What warrior can stand against a wood-man?"

"We'll have to select a man," repeated Mogglesby.

"May a serpent swallow me," wailed Loaga, "but the Baloongas are lost." He pondered a moment longer and then added. "We are forbidden even to make a feast and fortify our strength by a sacrifice, and still in three days one of our warriors must meet a wood-man."

"Listen, Loaga," said Mogglesby. "I have thought that over too. There

is a virtue in—well—in using men as the M'Bembi do, which I never realized until I visited the wood-men. You may go on with life here in the village in the usual way until this contest is fought."

At such a concession from the white man Loaga was amazed and delighted. He invited Mogglesby to join the M'Bembi, assuring him that he would be made a head-man and would under no circumstances be eaten.

The Englishman declined with a qualm of repulsion and went to his hut. He had hardly got to his sleeping place and stretched out on the panther skin bed when the thundering of the tom-tom broke out in the idol house.

The promptness with which Loaga had seized on Mogglesby's permission disturbed the governor's agent. He lay listening to the interminable uproar when the flap of his hut opened and a small figure whipped inside.

"Governor," whispered the doctor's voice in a sort of horror, "what in the hell did you let 'em start that drumming again for. My God, this time, it may—it may be—" The little man stood inside the hut peering out, looking up and down the street in the darkness.

"Listen, Doctor," said Mogglesby. "Light that lamp and sit down. I want to talk to a white man."

The rabbit of a man turned inside to obey the order; as he flipped his cigar lighter with unsteady fingers, he repeated in his aspirate:

"But I—I tell you, Mr. Mogglesby, this time it—it may be me. I—I ought never to have joined the M'Bembi, Governor. Even in poker I never used to play for—for anything more than penny ante." He wet his lips in the small light of the coconut oil flame.

"That's exactly what I want to explain," said the big man slowly. "Doctor, my visit to the wood-men has taught me a wonderful lot. Now, for instance, Kekechex couldn't even understand the meaning of patriotism or public spirit or brotherly love. The wood-men simply have no concepts in that category."

"Governor, what are you talking about?" inquired the little man blankly.

"Well—nothing—let that pass. Here's what I want to tell you, Doctor. It seems to me all of our human emotions of pity, sacrifice, hero worship; our feeling for drama and pageantry; our temples, the beginnings of sculpture, our feeling of brotherhood, are all based fundamentally on cannibalism. If our ancestors had not eaten each other for millions of years we would still be wood-men today, living in banyans without a tool to our hands, a roof over our heads or a work of art for our eyes."

"Governor," shivered the doctor, "you are worse than Loaga. All he claims is that it makes a man brave and strong."

"I am saying the same thing in a different way. In essence Loaga is eternally right."

The little man suddenly began sniffing.

"That's—that's all very well for you, Mr. Mogglesby, to sit here and be talking like that. You don't have to go. But the tom-tom is beating and I have to go, and maybe I'll be killed and cooked and you could stop it all with a word. You wouldn't be sitting here praising cannibalism if

you—you—" He broke off and suddenly flung himself face down on the floor of the hut. He began screaming.

"I can't—I can't do it—if I only knew it wouldn't be me!"

And he lay shuddering and sobbing, his arms stretched out with his fingers scratching into the earthen floor of the hut.

Mogglesby sat looking at this extremity of terror at first with disgust but presently with reflection.

"Doctor," he said at last, "you are a scoffer of religion, aren't you? That is, at rebinding yourself to other men. You never gave a thought to anybody but yourself in your whole life, did you?"

The little man made no reply but ceased his sobbing and lay on his belly with his arms stretched out.

"Well, Doctor," decided the big man at last, "you are really not fit to die. Go to the idol house and say to Loaga that the M'Bembi need not feast tonight in order to choose a warrior to meet the wood-man. Tell the M'Bembi that I will meet the wood-man in the savanna at noon three days from now."

The doctor got to his feet and went out into the night and presently the tom-tom stopped beating.

On the morning of the third day the doctor, as a high officer in the M'Bembi, made up a great procession in honor of Mogglesby and marched with the champion to the field of combat. The little man with his *assegai* ornamented with three rooster feathers led the very front of the column until they were close to the savanna, then he gave the post of honor to Mogglesby and Loaga and Luomo.

The big Englishman could hardly believe in the validity of the very encounter he was approaching. His expedition to the banyan held the unreal quality of a dream. He could not really believe that it had ever happened. He did not expect to find the wood-men in the savanna.

Old Luomo, however, was perfectly confident. As she neared the open space she went ahead, stooping and peering to get a first glimpse of the anthropoids. Once she said to Mogglesby:

"If the wood-men lose and have to go away to the other side of the mountains perhaps they will take me with them. I should think Keckechex would want to see me now and then."

The black men were screwed up with doubt as to whether the wood-men would be at the appointed place or not. There was nothing unreal about it to them; they simply placed no faith in the simians.

They kept whispering from behind, "Have they come, Luomo? Have they come?" because it was well known that the old woman could discern a gorilla long before any one else. And the black woman would shake her head, troubled—

"I don't see them yet, but they will be there."

A few minutes later the black men marched out of the jungle into the savanna and stood wrinkling their eyes against its blinding brilliance. It was, as Mogglesby thought it would be, quite empty.

As the Englishman stood looking at the enormous trees that surrounded the savanna, a kind of relief went through him when he saw for a certainty that the Baloongas would not be asked to vacate their village and trek beyond the mountains.

The black men stood in the sunshine and presently one of them suggested that since they had come for nothing they might as well go back.

To this the wizened Saminu objected.

"Let us stay where we are, brothers, and wait for the wood-men."

The feeling of respite from some enormous struggle began to fill Mogglesby's nerves. The white man's intellect had never believed the gorillas would come, but somehow his nerves and muscles had believed it.

"No, I don't believe they will come," he said, glancing up into the heavy gloomy leaves of a paddlewood tree near which he stood.

Then he glanced up, he stopped breathing and simply stood and looked. Between the two curtains of leaves he saw the flattened demoniacal face of a wood-man looking down at the Baloongas.

For ten seconds the Englishman simply stood and gazed at the fanged hideousness of the animal above him. And he realized more poignantly than ever that such horror as he felt could not have sprung up against a simple animal. He knew again it was a profound reverberation in his nerves of some ancient inheritance, a racial hatred that had sprung up when the Cro-Magnons had struggled with the Neanderthals for the possession of Europe. And now here was the most primitive battle of the human species being refought in the jungle of Africa.

He broke through the spell of archaic horror and pointed upward,

"There is one up on that branch," he said aloud. "I suppose there are others."

The black men became suddenly alert, poising their *assegais*. Loaga peered at the creature, then waved his men away.

"Let them come down," he said. "I suppose there must be more."

The simian seemed to understand the clearing maneuver of the black men below, for it caught a branch with its long arm, swung lower, crossed an open space among the limbs with a fearfully easy agility and dropped to the ground.

At this signal the whole nearby group of giant trees became alive with the anthropoids and fifteen, perhaps twenty, of the animals dropped to the ground, then moved away awkwardly to the opposite side of the savanna, running on their short legs and on the knuckles of their long arms. It gave them a look of wonderfully agile cripples scuttling away on crutches.

The gorillas drew up in a huddle on the opposite side of the field. Mogglesby stood looking at his enemies across geologic epochs. He sensed by their very huddled formation that his antagonist would employ inhuman holds and tactics. He stripped off his shirt and undershirt in order that the neck band might not inadvertently strangle him and advanced toward the simians.

A broad black animal with an enormous spread of arms and satanic countenance came out to meet the human being. As the two creatures ap-

proached each other the wood-man began drumming his chest and the tuft on its peaked bony head twitched up and down with the beginning of its anger.

The huge Englishman moved up toward the thing in the crouch of a wrestler. From each side of the savanna the gorillas and the black men watched their champions in the white blaze of light. For a few moments the governor's agent was aware of this strange double audience, then they faded out in his concentration on his fantastic antagonist. The thing's enormous arms daunted the Englishman. He thrust out his head at the monster and made a feint with his ridiculously short arms.

The next instant came the swish of a paw. The man squatted and leaped in under the blow. Something like the limb of a tree with a hand on it struck Mogglesby. It numbed and slewed him around, but the man plunged in along the arm and began pounding away at the pot belly of the simian. The thing went down at once and at the same moment something caught and tore at the Englishman's thigh. The man realized with sudden horror that the thing had terrific fighting hands for feet. It was like an onslaught out of the earth.

The man tried to kick these horrible lower hands. He fell on the gorilla, and succeeded in catching a foot in the hook of his knee. He felt his whole body shaken by the creature's effort to free his foot. At the same time the enormous arms wrapped around him, drawing him toward the fanged muzzle. The man jammed his head hard against the simian's huge chest. He worked his short arms terrifically against the hairy belly. Blows like a pile driver fell on the white man's back and head. The thing's loose foot was ripping his thigh and trying to push up between their two bodies and disembowel him.

He tried to lie flatter on the furious gorilla. He reached his hand upward along the chest and neck; he ran his fingers around the frothing muzzle of the ogre and with all his strength thrust his thumb into the cavernous eyes.

Of a sudden the wood-man roared, began a frantic shaking and shoving away of the powerful white man. Mogglesby clung desperately against the enormous thrust. He dug his thumb into the eye. He felt the ball roll deep in its socket; he felt it tear and the humour spurt out on his fingers.

The monster wrung loose his foot and tore at Mogglesby's loins, then flung the man off in a roaring agony. The Englishman felt himself fly through the air and strike the ground. He rose groggily to his feet. The cloth of his trousers seemed ground into the red mass of his legs. The savanna seemed to sway round and round. He staggered toward the gorilla, which squatted, roaring and rubbing its enormous forearms over its eyes.

At the moment the man felt with the anthropoid a furious equality of being. They were two equal branches of life struggling for the mastery of the savanna.

Mogglesby weaved toward the blinded simian. He got behind it, caught it around its bulk and made a last terrific heave. The animal gave a bari-

tone scream of terror, caught at Mogglesby with all four hands, but the next instant was raised aloft and crashed down on its skull under the man's weight.

The thing lay still. Somewhere the white man heard a great shouting and hallooing. In a red haze he saw the wood-men flying on feet and knuckles toward the trees, while the black men came running toward the gladiators with joyous shouts. They were calling him the lion man, the white panther. They had seen the spirit of Mumbo fighting by his side.

"Sit here," cried Loaga in intoxication. "Rest here where the sun will cure your wounds!"

"What an arm you have!" cried Sammu, touching the torn arm. "As huge as the wood-man's."

Mogglesby sat panting, his huge breast rising and falling. The Baloongas gathered about him, gazing at him with excited eyes. Never had the sun witnessed such a battle. At a signal from Loaga, the black men began pulling up dried grass and running with it to Mogglesby for a bed, for a soft bed for their champion to rest on. Suddenly Sammu began flinging up his hands and screeching in ecstasy. The brothers of the M'Bembi piled dead grass around the wounded hero.

All at once from behind, the white man felt a crashing blow on his neck. It did not decapitate him. He leaped up with a roar of rage and dashed at the black man who had struck with his *assegai*. He had the miscreant in his hands. Instantly *assegaïs* from a dozen of the M'Bembi launched at the champion. Mogglesby felt a kind of profound universal pain, as if dull pain covered the red sky and soaked the earth itself.

He tried to strike out at the nearest black man, but the next moment was down on the earth. He saw a multitude of hands piling dry grass over him. The sky, the sunlight was lost in grass. Somewhere Mogglesby felt that fire was burning something; somewhere pain was flowing through nerves and flesh other than his own . . .

Toward sunset Loaga stopped the dancing and the feeding and spoke to the Baloongas.

"Brothers of the M'Bembi," said the head-man of the village, "your hearts are now the hearts of a lion. All of you are brave, generous, unconquerable warriors. But the great Mogglesby looked with forbidding eyes on these sacrifices. We now, who have the heart of the master, we too must look upon this custom with forbidding eyes. We are a great people and the sacrificing of our brothers must cease. Tomorrow the warriors of the Baloongas will trek to Ghandis and submit ourselves to the governor."

\* \* \*

#### NOTE—

Here the doctor's narrative ended abruptly and most inconclusively. A number of questions could and should have been asked in the interest of science but the utter queeriness of the tale prevented a considered interrogation. It would have been like an attempt to question Scheherazade about

one of the Arabian Nights, except, of course, the doctor's narrative sounded true.

The transcriber of these notes sat for a long time staring out of the wine-shop into the white furnace of sunshine that beat down on the Belgian Congo. Grotesque fancies of unknowable pre-human millenniums drifted through his imagination. Was it possible the little doctor had stumbled unwittingly upon the tragic force that had lifted man to his high estate?

The doctor himself had toppled over in a gin-drugged sleep and could be aroused no more. The transcriber sat for a long time looking for a space at his senseless form, then out into the glare of the river. After awhile he got his notes together, wondering as he stuffed the sheets into his brief-case whether he had something true or false . . .

However, as heretofore stated, on August 28th the uncivilized Baloongas came *en masse* from the Eastern province of British Baloongaland and became communicants of the Anglican church in the port of Ghandis.

—T. S. S.

*New York*



# *Asleep in Armageddon*

by Ray Bradbury

*Even when dealing with the perilously stereotyped modern interplanetary story, the devilish pen of Ray Bradbury achieves that originality of concept, that special spark of subtle pin-pricking that has made him outstanding. This story, the devilish pen of Ray Bradbury achieves that originality of concept, the most near-to-believable stage wherein one lone man can have an entire world to himself . . . to himself and few disquieting dreams.*

Y

YOU DON'T WANT death and you don't expect death. Something goes wrong, your rocket tilts in space, a planetoid jumps up, blackness, movement, hands over the eyes, a violent pulling back of available power in the fore-jets, the crash . . .

The darkness. In the darkness, the senseless pain. In the pain, the nightmare.

He was not unconscious.

*Your name?* asked hidden voices. *Sale*, he replied in whirling nausea. *Leonard Sale. Occupation*, cried the voices. *Spaceman!* he cried, alone in the night. *Welcome*, said the voices. *Welcome, welcome.* They faded.

He stood up in the wreckage of his ship. It lay like a folded, tattered garment around him.

The sun rose and it was morning.

Sale pried himself out the small airlock and stood breathing the atmosphere. Luck. Sheer luck. The air was breathable. An instant's checking showed him that he had two months' supply of food with him. Fine, fine! And this—he fingered at the wreckage. Miracle of miracles! The radio was intact.

He stuttered out the message on the sending key. CRASHED ON PLANETOID 787. SALE. SEND HELP. SALE. SEND HELP.

The reply came instantly: HELLO, SALE. THIS IS ADDAMS IN MARSPORT. SENDING RESCUE SHIP LOGARITHM. WILL ARRIVE PLANETOID 787 IN SIX DAYS. HANG ON.

Sale did a little dance.

It was simple as that. One crashed. One had food. One radioed for help. Help came. *La!* He clapped his hands.

The sun rose and was warm. He felt no sense of mortality. Six days would be no time at all. He would eat, he would read, he would sleep. He glanced at his surroundings. No dangerous animals; a tolerable oxygen supply. What more could one ask. Beans and bacon, was the answer. The happy smell of breakfast filled the air.

After breakfast he smoked a cigarette slowly, deeply, blowing out. He nodded contentedly. What a life! Not a scratch on him. Luck. Sheer luck.

His head nodded. Sleep, he thought.

Good idea. Forty winks. Plenty of time to sleep, take it easy. Six whole long, luxurious days of idling and philosophizing. Sleep.

He stretched himself out, tucked his arm under his head, and shut his eyes.

Insanity came in to take him. The voices whispered.

*Sleep, yes, sleep,* said the voices. *Ab, sleep, sleep.*

He opened his eyes. The voices stopped. Everything was normal. He shrugged. He shut his eyes casually, fitfully. He settled his long body.

*Eeeeeeeeeeee,* sang the voices, far away.

*Abbbbbb,* sang the voices.

*Sleep, sleep, sleep, sleep, sleep,* sang the voices.

*Die, die, die, die, die,* sang the voices.

*Oooooooooooooooooo,* cried the voices.

*Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm,* a bee ran through his brain.

He sat up. He shook his head. He put his hands to his ears. He blinked at the crashed ship. Hard metal. He felt the solid rock under his fingers. He saw the real sun warming the blue sky.

Let's try sleeping on our back, he thought. He adjusted himself, lying back down. His watch ticked on his wrist. The blood burned in his veins.

*Sleep, sleep, sleep, sleep, sleep,* sang the voices.

*Obbbbbb,* sang the voices.

*Abbbbbb,* sang the voices.

*Die, die, die, die, die. Sleep, sleep, die, sleep, die, sleep, die! Oohbb. Abbbbb. Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!*

Blood tapped in his ears. The sound of the wind rising.

*Mine, mine,* said a voice. *Mine, mine, he's mine!*

*No, mine, mine,* said another voice. *No, mine, mine; he's mine!*

*No, ours, ours,* sang ten voices. *Ours, ours, he's ours!*

His fingers twitched. His jaws spasmed. His eyelids jerked.

*At last, at last,* sang a high voice. *Now, now. The long time, the waiting. Over, over,* sang the high voice. *Over, over at last!*

It was like being undersea. Green songs, green visions, green time. Bubbled voices drowning in deep liquors of sea tide. Far away choruses chanting senseless rhymes. Leonard Sale stirred in agony.

*Mine, mine,* cried a loud voice. *Mine, mine!* shrieked another. *Ours, ours!* shrieked the chorus.

The din of metal, the crash of sword, the conflict, the battle, the fight, the war. All of it exploding, his mind fiercely torn apart!

Eeeeeeeeeeeeeee!

He leaped up, screaming. The landscape melted and flowed.

A voice said, "I am Tylle of Rathalar. Proud Tylle, Tylle of the Blood Mound and the Death Drum. Tylle of Rathalar, Killer of Men!"

Another spoke, "I am Iorr of Wendillo, Wise Iorr, Destroyer of Infidels!"

The chorus chanted. "And we the warriors, we the steel, we the warriors, we the red blood rushing, the red blood falling, the red blood steaming the sun—"

Leonard Sale staggered under the burden. "Go away!" he cried. "Leave me, in God's name, leave me!"

Eeeeeeeeeeeee, shrieked the high sound of steel hot on steel.

Silence.

He stood with the sweat boiling out of him. He was trembling so violently he could not stand. Insane, he thought. Absolutely insane. Raving insane. Insane.

He jerked the food kit open, did something to a chemical packet. Hot coffee was ready in an instant. He mouthed it, spilled gushes of it down his shirt. He shivered. He sucked in raw gulps of breath.

Let's be logical, he thought, sitting down heavily. The coffee seared his tongue. No record of insanity in the family for two hundred years. All healthy, well-balanced. No reason for insanity now. Shock? Silly. No shock. I'm to be rescued in six days. No shock to that. No danger. Just an ordinary planetoid. Ordinary, ordinary place. No reason for insanity. I'm sane.

Oh? cried a small metal voice within. An echo. Fading.

"Yes!" he cried, beating his fists together. "Sane!"

Hababababababababab. Somewhere a vanishing laughter.

He whirled about. "Shut up, you!" he cried.

We didn't say anything, said the mountains. We didn't say anything, said the sky. We didn't say anything, said the wreckage.

"All right then," he said, swaying. "See that you don't."

Everything was normal.

The pebbles were getting hot. The sky was big and blue. He looked at his fingers and saw the way the sun burned on every black hair. He looked at his boots and the dust on them. Suddenly he felt very happy because he made a decision. I won't go to sleep, he thought. I'm having nightmares, so why sleep. There's your solution.

He made a routine. From nine o'clock in the morning, which was this minute, until twelve, he would walk around and see the planetoid. He would write on a pad with a yellow pencil everything he saw. Then he would sit down and open a can of oily sardines and some canned fresh bread with good butter on it. From twelve-thirty until four he would read nine chapters of *War and Peace*. He took the book from the wreckage, and

laid it where he might find it later. There was a book of T. S. Eliot's poetry, too. That might be nice.

Supper would come at five-thirty and then from six until ten he would listen to the radio from Earth. There would be a couple of bad comedians telling jokes and a bad singer singing some song, and the latest news flashes, signing off at midnight with the UN anthem.

After that?

He felt sick.

I'll play solitaire until dawn, he thought. I'll sit up and drink hot black coffee and play solitaire, no cheating, until sunrise.

Ho, ho, he thought.

"What did you say?" he asked himself.

"I said, 'Ha ha,' " he replied. "*Some* time, you'll have to sleep."

"I'm wide awake," he said.

"Liar," he retorted, enjoying the conversation.

"I feel fine," he said.

"Hypocrite," he replied.

"I'm not afraid of the night, or sleep, or anything," he said.

"*Very* funny," he said.

He felt bad. He wanted to sleep. And the fact that he was afraid of sleep made him want to lie down all the more and shut his eyes and curl up. "Comfy-cozy?" asked his ironic censor.

"I'll just walk and look at the rocks and the geological formations and think how good it is to be alive," he said.

"Ye gods," cried his censor. "William Saroyan!"

You'll go on, he thought, maybe one day, maybe one night, but what about the next night and the next, and the *next*? Can you stay awake *all* that time, for six nights? Until the rescue ship comes? Are you *that* good, *that* strong?

The answer was no.

What are you afraid of? I don't know. Those voices. Those sounds. But they can't hurt you, can they?

They *might*. You've got to face them some time. Must I? Brace up to it, old man. Chin up, and all that rot.

He sat down on the hard ground. He felt very much like crying. He felt as if life was over and he was entering new and unknown territory. It was such a deceiving day, with the sun warm; physically, he felt able and well, one might fish on such a day as this, or pick flowers or kiss a woman or anything. But in the midst of a lovely day, what did one get?

Death.

Well, hardly *that*.

Death, he insisted.

He lay down and closed his eyes. He was tired of messing around.

All right, he thought, if you *are* death, come get me. I want to know what all this damned nonsense is about.

Death came.

\* \* \* \* \*

Eeeeeeeeeeeeeee, said a voice.

Yes, I know, said Leonard Sale, lying there. But what else?

Abbbbbbbbbbbbbbb, said a voice.

I know that, also, said Leonard Sale, irritably. He turned cold. His mouth hung open wildly.

"I am Tylle of Rathalar, Killer of Men!"

"I am Iorr of Wendillo, Destroyer of Infidels!"

What is this place? asked Leonard Sale, struggling against horror.

"Once a mighty planet!" said Tylle of Rathalar.

"Once a place of battles!" said Iorr of Wendillo.

"Now dead," said Tylle.

"Now silent," said Iorr.

"Until *you* came," said Tylle.

"To give us life again," said Iorr.

You're dead, insisted Leonard Sale, flesh writhing. You're nothing but empty wind.

"We live, through you."

"And fight, through *you*!"

So that's it, thought Leonard Sale. I'm to be a battleground, am I? Are you friends?

"Enemies!" cried Iorr.

"Foul enemies!" cried Tylle.

Leonard smiled a rictal smile. He felt ghastly. How long have you waited? he demanded.

"How long is *time*?" Ten thousand years? "Perhaps." Ten million years? Perhaps."

What are you? Thoughts, spirits, ghosts? "All of those, and more." Intelligences? "Precisely." How did you survive?

Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee, sang the chorus, far away.

Abbbbbbbbbbbbbbb, sang another army, waiting to fight.

"Once upon a time, this was fertile land, a rich planet. And there were two nations, strong nations, led by two strong men. I, Iorr. And he, that one who calls himself Tylle. And the planet declined and gave way to nothingness. The peoples and the armies languished in the midst of a great war which had lasted five thousand years. We lived long lives and loved long loves, drank much, slept much, fought much. And when the planet died, our bodies withered, and, only in time, and with much science, did we survive."

Survive, wondered Leonard Sale. But there is nothing of you!

"Our *minds*, fool, our *minds*! What is a body without a mind?"

What is a mind without a *body*, laughed Leonard Sale. I've got you there. Admit it, I've got you!

"True," said the cruel voice. "One is useless lacking the other. But survival is survival even when unconscious. The minds of our nations, through science, through wonder, survived."

But without senses, lacking eyes, ears, lacking touch, smell, and the rest?



He managed, after a time, to cook himself a few hot biscuits, which he ate with strawberry jam. He wiped his stained fingers on his shirt, blindly, trying not to think.

"At least I know what I'm up against," he thought. "Oh, Lord, what a world. What an innocent looking world, and what a monster it really is. It's good no one ever explored it before. Or *did* they?" He shook his aching head. Pity them, who ever crashed here before, if any ever did. Warm sun, hard rocks, not a sign of hostility. A lovely world.

Until you shut your eyes and relaxed your mind.

And the night and the voices and the insanity and the death padded in on soft feet.

"I'm all right now, though," he said, proudly. "Look at that!" He displayed his hand. By a supreme effort of will, it was no longer shaking. "I'll show you who in hell's ruler here," he announced to the innocent sky. "I am." He tapped his chest.

To think that *thought* could live that long! A million years, perhaps, all these thoughts of death and disorder and conquest, lingering in the innocent but poisonous air of the planet, waiting for a real man to give them a channel through which they might issue again in all their senseless virulence.

Now that he was feeling better, it was all silly. All I have to do, he thought, is stay awake six nights. They won't bother me that way. When I'm awake, I'm dominant. I'm stronger than those crazy monarchs and their silly tribes of sword-flingers and shield-bearers and horn-blowers. I'll stay awake.

But *can* you? he wondered. Six whole nights? Awake?

There's coffee and medicine and books and cards.

But I'm tired *now*, so tired, he thought. Can I hold out?

Well, if not. There's always the gun.

Where will these silly monarchs be if you put a bullet through their stage? All the world's a stage? No. *You*, Leonard Sale, are the small stage. And they the players. And what if you put a bullet through the wings, tearing down scenes, destroying curtains, ruining lines! Destroy the stage, the players, all, if they aren't careful!

First of all, he must radio through to Marsport, again. If there was any way they could rush the rescue ship sooner, then maybe he could hang on. Anyway, he must warn them what sort of planet this was, this so innocent-seeming spot of nightmare and fever vision—

He tapped on the radio key for a minute. His mouth tightened. The radio was dead.

It had sent through the proper rescue message, received a reply, and then extinguished itself.

The proper touch of irony, he thought. There was only one thing to do. Draw a plan.

This he did. He got a yellow pencil and delineated his six-day plan of escape.

Tonight, he wrote, read six more chapters of *War and Peace*. At four

in the morning have hot black coffee. At four-fifteen take cards from pack and play ten games of solitaire. This should take until six-thirty when—more coffee. At seven o'clock, listen to early morning programs from Earth, if the receiving equipment on the radio works at all. Does it?

He tried the radio receiver. It was dead.

Well, he wrote, from seven o'clock until eight, sing all the songs you remember, make your own entertainment. From eight until nine think about Helen King. Remember Helen. On second thought, think about Helen right now.

He marked that out with his pencil.

The rest of the days were set down in minute detail.

He checked the medical kit. There were several packets of tablets that would keep you awake. One tablet an hour every hour for six days. He felt quite confident.

"Here's mud in your evil eye, Iorr, Tylle!"

He swallowed one of the stay-wake tablets with a scalding mouth of black coffee.

Well, with one thing and another it was Tolstoy or Balzac, gin-rummy, coffee, tablets, walking, more Tolstoy, more Balzac, more gin-rummy, more solitaire. The first day passed, as did the second and the third.

On the fourth day he lay quietly in the shade of a rock, counting to a thousand by fives, then by tens, to keep his mind occupied and awake. His eyes were so tired he had to bathe them frequently in cool water. He couldn't read, he was bothered with splitting headaches. He was so exhausted he couldn't move. He was numb with medicine. He resembled a waxen dummy, stuffed with things to preserve him in a state of horrified wakefulness. His eyes were glass, his tongue a rusted pike, his fingers felt as if they were gloved in needles and fur.

He followed the hand of his watch. One second less to wait, he thought. Two seconds, three seconds, four, five, ten, thirty seconds. A whole minute. Now an hour less time to wait. Oh, ship, hurry on thy appointed round!

He began to laugh softly.

What would happen if he just gave up, drifted off into sleep? Sleep, ah, sleep; perchance to dream. All the world a stage. . . . What if he gave up the unequal struggle, lapsed down?

Eeeeeeeeeee, the high, shrill warning sound of battle metal.

He shivered. His tongue moved in his dry, burry mouth.

Iorr and Tylle would battle out their ancient battle.

Leonard Sale would become quite insane.

And whichever won the battle would take this ruin of an insane man, the shaking, laughing wild body, and wander it across the face of this world for ten, twenty years, occupying it, striding in it, pompous, holding court, making grand gestures, ordering heads severed, calling on inward unseen dancing girls. Leonard Sale, what remained of him, would be led off to some hidden cave, there to be infested with wars and worms of wars



for twenty insane years, occupied and prostituted by old and outlandish thoughts.

When the rescue ship arrived it would find nothing. Sale would be hidden somewhere by a triumphant army in his head. Hidden in some cleft of rock, placed there like a nest for Iorr to lie upon in evil occupation.

The thought of it almost broke him in half.

Twenty years of insanity. Twenty years of torture, doing what you don't want to do. Twenty years of wars raging and being split apart, twenty years of nausea and trembling.

His head sank down between his knees. His eyes snapped and cracked and made soft noises. His eardrums popped tiredly.

*Sleep, sleep, sang soft sea voices.*

I'll—I'll make a proposition with you, listen, thought Leonard Sale. You, Iorr, you, too, Tylle! Iorr, you can occupy me on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Tylle, you can take me over on Sundays, Tuesdays and Saturdays. Thursday is maid's night out. Okay?

*Eeeeeeeeeeeeeee, sang the sea tides, seething in his brain.*

*Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh, sang the distant voices softly, soft.*

What'll you say, is it a *bargain*, Iorr, Tylle?

*No*, said a voice.

*No*, said another.

Greedy, both of you, greedy! complained Sale. A pox on both your houses!

He slept.

He *was* Iorr, jeweled rings on his hands. He arose beside his rocket and held out his fingers, commanding blind armies. He was Iorr, ancient ruler of jeweled warriors.

He *was* Tylle, lover of women, killer of dogs!

With some hidden bit of awareness, his hand crept to the holster at his hip. The sleeping hand withdrew the gun there. The hand lifted, the gun pointed.

The armies of Tylle and Iorr gave battle.

The gun exploded.

The bullet tore across Sale's forehead, wakening him.

He stayed awake for another six hours, getting over his latest siege. He knew it to be hopeless now. He washed and bandaged the wound he had given himself. He wished he had aimed straighter and it was all over. He watched the sky. Two more days. Two more. Come on, ship, come on. He was heavy with sleeplessness.

No use. At the end of six hours he was raving badly. He took the gun up and put it down and took it up again, put it against his head, tightened his hand on the trigger, changed his mind, looked at the sky again.

Night settled. He tried to read, threw the book away. He tore it up and burned it, just to have something to do.

So tired. In another hour, he decided. If nothing happens, I'll kill myself. This is for certain now. I'll *do* it, this time.

He got the gun ready and laid it on the ground next to himself.

He was very calm now, though tired. It would be over and done. He would be dead.

He watched the minute hand of his watch. One minute, five minutes, twenty-five minutes.

The flame appeared on the sky.

It was so unbelievable he started to cry. "A rocket," he said, standing up. "A rocket!" he cried, rubbing his eyes. He ran forward.

The flame brightened, grew, came down.

He waved frantically, running forward, leaving his gun, his supplies, everything behind. "You *see* that, Iorr, Tylle! You savages, you monsters, I beat you! I *won*! They're coming to rescue me now! I've won, damn you."

He laughed harshly at the rocks and the sky and the backs of his hands.

The rocket landed. Leonard Sale stood swaying, waiting for the door lid to open.

"Goodbye, Iorr, goodbye, Tylle!" he shouted in triumph, grinning, eyes hot.

*Eeeeeee*, sang a diminishing roar in time.

*Abbbbbb*, voices faded.

The rocket flipped wide its airlock. Two men jumped out.

"Sale?" they called. "We're Ship ACDN13. Intercepted your SOS and decided to pick you up ourselves. The Marsport ship won't get through until day after tomorrow. We want a spot of rest ourselves. Thought it'd be good to spend the night here, pick you up, and go on."

"No," said Sale, face melting with terror. "No spend night——"

He couldn't talk. He fell to the ground.

"Quick," said a voice, in the bleary vortex over him. "Give him a shot of food liquid, another of sedative. He needs sustenance and rest."

"No rest!" screamed Sale.

"Delirious," said one man softly.

"No sleep!" screamed Sale.

"There, there," said the man gently. A needle poked into Sale's arm.

Sale thrashed. "No sleep, go!" he mouthed horribly. "Oh, go!"

"Delirious," said one man. "Shock."

"No *sedative*!" screamed Sale.

The sedative flowed into him.

*Eeeeeeeeeee*, sang the ancient winds.

*Abbbbbbbbbbbbbb*, sang the ancient seas.

"No sedative, no sleep, please, don't, don't, *don't!*" screamed Sale, trying to get up. "You don't——understand!"

"Take it easy, old man, you're safe among us now, nothing to worry about," said the rescuer above him.

Leonard Sale slept. The two men stood over him.

As they watched, Sale's features changed violently. He groaned and cried and snarled in his sleep. His face was riven with emotion. It was the face of a saint, a sinner, a fiend, a monster, a darkness, a light, one, many, an army, a vacuum, all, all!

He writhed in his sleep.

Eeeeeeeeee! the sound burst from his mouth. Abbbbbbbbbbb! he screamed.

"What's wrong with him?" asked one of the two rescuers.

"I don't know. More sedative?"

"More sedative. Nerves. He needs more sleep."

They stuck the needle in his arm. Sale writhed and spat and moaned.

Then, suddenly, he was dead.

He lay there, the two men over him. "What a shame," said one of them.

"Can you figure that?"

"Shock. Poor guy. What a pity." They covered his face. "Did you ever see a face like that?"

"Totally insane."

"Loneliness. Shock."

"Yes. Lord, what an expression. I hope never to see a face like *that* again."

"What a shame, waiting for us, and we arrive, and he dies anyway."

They glanced around. "What shall we do? Shall we spend the night?"

"Yes. It's good to be out of the ship."

"We'll bury him first, of course."

"Naturally."

"And spend the night in the open, with good air, right? Good to be in the open again. After two weeks in that damned ship."

"Right. I'll find a spot for him. You start supper, eh?"

"Done."

"Should be good sleeping tonight."

"Fine, fine."

They made a grave and said a word over it. They drank their evening coffee silently. They smelled the sweet air of the planet and looked at the lovely sky and the bright and beautiful stars.

"What a night," they said, lying down.

"Pleasant dreams," said one, rolling over.

And the other replied, "Pleasant dreams."

They slept.

# *The Inheritors*

*by John Michel and Robert Lowndes*

*The test of existence is the ability of a species to adapt itself to a changing environment. The first law of existence would seem to be therefore the ability of each type of creature to combat the obstacles of nature successfully. Humanity is as subject to this as any other creature. Our success so far has been due entirely to our ability to outfox both the normal and abnormal attacks of nature. The greatest detriment to our struggle for survival has become in the past century our tendency to self-destruction. In this arresting and grim story, there is projected a climax to this struggle for existence. "The Inheritors" is a novelette from one of the minor pulps but it has already been hailed as a "lost classic" by fans in the know.*

## I

A

GREAT BARE plain, misty, grey, vapours swirling in endless writhing strings. Horizons in shadow, dimmed, seemingly limited but stretching everywhere to nowhere. Small, jagged ridges covered with a green slime from which pale streamers arose in slow ascent to the invisible sky.

Silence. Heavy, thick, interwoven with the mists, a part of them. Silence, broken by footsteps, the sound of metal on rock.

A shape looming up out of the darkness, human, bulbous. A figure in grey metal with fantastic eyes of glass, metal-clad arms pumping up and down. Then for a few moments the monotonous click of his footsteps leading forward. To where?

"Hayward! Hayward! Why don't you answer? Where are you? Hayward!"

The cry pierced through nothing but the ether and was absorbed into silence. The figure who uttered it stopped and swung about. One metal-gloved hand clutched frantically at the face-plate of the gasproof suit's helmet.

A face within pressed against the glass, eyes popping, striving to spear through the impenetrable mists. Again the cry. The fumbling hands fell limp. The figure fell inert to the slimy floor of the endlessly stretching room. Its roof, the hidden sky, gave back no answer. But again.

"Tom, Tom, I'm lost. Tom, where are you? *Where am I?*"

The metal-cased human raised itself on one elbow and clutched for support at a small hilly mound a foot away. The hand closed on its top—and pulled away. The rock was rotten, eaten away as was everything else in the world of shadows. With a viscous splash, the figures fell back into the muck. Again the cry.

"The air's going fast. Tom! Where's the Fortress, where's the council, where's the Fortress . . . The Fortress!" an hysterical laugh, "yes, *where*. Where's *anything*? Anything but this muck and mist? Tom! If you don't come back the engines will stop. You were so good at mending them. Tom!" the voice took on a crafty note of supplication, "you wouldn't let the City die. Not Tom Hayward! I might. I'm weak. Amos Bevin's weak, Tom. He's no good to the Fortress, but now, *you*, you Tom Hayward, you, you. . . ."

The helmeted head slipped forward, buried itself in the green slime.

Rocks, earth, sky. All shifting vapours and unstable. No direction. No up or down. Merely a space between one nothingness and the next. No light but a wavering twilight, like evening seen through storm clouds. The earth a crushed vista of emptiness, without solidity, drowned in acid ooze. Silence, now, complete.

The precise spot occupied by the prostrate body had once been a farm in southern Ohio. Once—two hundred years before—it had borne green grass and laughing plants beneath a great, burning sun. The seasons had come and gone, the balmy Spring, Summer, the crisp Autumn, Winter. The land had remained the land. Sweet-smelling, green, drenched in light and sun and air. Southern Ohio. A mighty plain of waving wheat drinking from the warm, wet earth. Earth, damp with clean rain. Earth smelling of *earth*.

The wars came and changed this land. The metal monsters of guns and armored tanks swept over it and churned it and buried it. The seasons came and went and presently the land bore a new crop—of bones and rotting flesh and fragments of bombs. The sweet air was filled with the roar of cruelly clawed birds, birds that spat thunder and flame and obscured the sun. The rains came again and washed away the earth and exposed naked rock. And then the gas. The gas rolled in from the ocean and the northern lakes and from far above. It covered the land in thick clouds and buried it forever from the light of day and the light of night. It combined with the soil and the rocks and changed them into hissing slime. The people who used the land vanished. They went into the earth in giant steel fortresses and forgot the land and the smell of it and the sunlight and natural air. Because all this had been taken away. After a time they forgot what they were fighting for and fought blindly, fortress against fortress, with weapons mighty and irresistible. Presently nothing was left but a scarred surface and here and there at indistinguishable points, the fortress cities, immense masses of steel and glass, battered, pitted, buried away from even the gloomy ruins of the earth's surface, filled with complicated machinery that whirled and banged and filled the endless hours with endless

roaring, powered by obscure energies, djinns pouring forth hour by hour and day by day instruments of warfare.

Earth was dead—a heaving ball of ooze-covered rock and water, bubbling eternally as the explosive weapons fired from the cities beneath and burst at the surface, aimed nowhere, directed by caricatures of humanity, men with but one intent and one purpose, to fight, to fight, to kill and destroy.

The fallen figure stirred again. It did not cry out, but from within the helmet came sounds of helpless sobbing. Raising itself painfully, it straightened and staggered off.

One foot up, one foot down, onward and onward. Onward into the unchanging gloom until it blindly struck another figure, prone on the ground. The other's arms were outstretched; still fingers clutched the handle of a great metal door, hinged like the top of a cistern and welded into the top of an almost buried metal cylinder some two yards across.

"Tom!" the moving figure's diaphragm burst the silence in a shriek of delight that was silenced almost immediately. Amos Bevin reached down and shook the metal-cased image of Tom Hayward. There was no response.

"Tom! You've found the exit-port! You've found it. Come on, we're home. It's the Fortress!"

Hayward was dead. The other knelt weakly and turned him over. Through the face plate he saw a picture of utter horror. The face was gone. In its place was a shapeless, frozen mass. Expressionless, a mask of utter vacuity, the eyes bulging and congested with solidified blood.

"Tom! You found the Fortress and you—found—what the others found." A mad shriek of laughter. Bevin let the face plate drop and drew himself up. He shook a futile fist at the sky.

"You've taken him as you took the others! You devils! Who are you? What are you? *Where* are you? Oh, I felt you near. Tangible as steel and elusive as those damned mists. We need light to see *them*. . . ."

He broke off with a shuddering gasp and dashed his arms in helpless rage against the steel door.

For a short while he stood stiffly, gazing unseeingly into the invisible distance. Then he gently disengaged Hayward's armored fingers from the steel handle of the door, turned it and sprang back as it opened with a churning roar. He looked down at the inert form for an instant and without further ado jumped feet first into the blackness of the open well. Behind him the steel port clanged shut.

"He's waking. The stuff's good. Hadn't decayed *yet*, like the other. Weyman, lift him—so."

Bevin heard the words through a lightening blackness. His ears were buzzing and his whole consciousness was nothing but a memory of that final moment on the outside when he had jumped through the exit-port and fainted while going down. Then the light shifted rapidly to the accustomed light grey of the Fortress' interior, and his eyes were open.

"Hello, Bevin."

He shifted his glance upward and met the eyes of a tall, gaunt man who held a hypodermic whose needle was still dripping with a dark purple fluid. The tall man tossed the hypodermic to a male nurse who caught it deftly, and sat down on the bed beside Bevin.

"Well? What did you find?"

Bevin's eyes clouded with pain. He tried to turn them away but the others were insistent, commanding. He clenched his fists and held them tightly against his side.

"Nothing," he said flatly.

The three in attendance stared. The tall man laid a hand on his wrist. "Bevin. Wake up. What did you find?"

The inert figure groaned.

"Can't you stop that damn pounding?"

The other grunted and looked up at the two men standing beside the bed.

"He'll be all right in a minute. What's that about pounding?"

The man addressed as Weyman smoothed out the front of his tunic with the flat of his hand.

"It's the machinery. He feels it more than we do."

"Well, what do we do now?"

"Payton, we've got to wait. Wait until he can talk rationally." Weyman stared directly into the other's eyes, "We've got to know what's out there *now*. It took three this morning, two men and a woman, and among the best specimens we have," he raised a hand to his face, pale and tinged with a faint green. "Damn this air. It's getting foul." One of the men was an atmosphere expert. "The machine's broken down—"

Payton put out a warning hand.

"Wait," he's coming to again. Bevin! Tell us what you found."

The man on the bed woke to full consciousness. He made a faint gesture of hopelessness.

"I told you. Nothing. Hayward's dead. It got him. I left him outside at the shaft entrance," a fit of coughing shook him, "you might send somebody up after the suit. We haven't many left."

Payton arose and folded his arms disgustedly.

"Come on. Let's get over to the atmosphere plant. We've got to see about that machine," he put a hand to his mouth and masked a hacking cough, "before we all die of suffaion."

They went out, leaving Bevin attended by the male nurse.

Payton and Weyman walked along the big corridor slowly. Their gait was irregular and shifty. Neither of them seemed able to balance perfectly. Nor could anyone else in the fortress. A hundred years of confinement in the machinery-crammed City had resulted in the degeneration of the inhabitants' synapses. Most of them acted like people with locomotor ataxia. The atmosphere had been overloaded with exhaust gases and the by-products of the liberation of energy for so long that it had finally taken effect on their organisms.

The skins of the fortress people were a ghastly shade of green, except for

the rims of the eyes which were dead white. The eyes themselves were completely colorless, the pupils shading into the oyster white of the irises. As a result of the introduction of synthetic food due to the loss of the earth's surface as source, their whole systems had become enervated and weakened. The physiological processes of life in the human animal had grown sluggish, almost inoperative. They found it impossible to synthesize several of the less important vitamins and were at the complete mercy of what were once minor respiratory infections. The life of the City, apart from its ceaseless production of materials for war, was a constant battle against disease and unconsciousness. Most of them were never completely aware of their environment. A sort of apathy tinged with resignation had gripped them, letting go only now and then to allow them to realize the full hideousness of their position.

None of them was brilliant. The intellectual minds among them had long ago vanished, leaving room for the sturdier and cruder, who organized the City into a military machine which operated in the main upon inertia and habit. The great weapons mounted upon the upper levels were loaded automatically. The men attending them had only to aim them somewhere above and touch off the charges. It had gone on like that for a very long time, aimlessly, by rote, an organized robotry that never slackened and seldom questioned. They were too full of poisons and toxins to think very clearly. The fortress was their whole life and it took every minute and used it relentlessly.

Far below the *machines* rumbled and roared. They filled the air with ceaseless noise and the odors of lubricating oils and heavy gases which were never completely dissipated and which further dimmed the feeble power of the illuminating system. Amidst the confusion the machines whirled on in their useless motions, converting energy into needed materials, immense quantities of explosives to feed the hungry juggernauts in the turrets above. And other machines growled and shook. Machines to make food. Machines to convert rock into air and light. Heaters, purifiers, filters, beakers, long lines of copper refrigeration coils, spinning dynamos, thumping ladles, tall rows of running belts, conveyor systems beyond comprehension. Power filled the spaces in the atmosphere left blank by the other elements and covered the steel walls and floors with crackling lightnings.

The machines were sick. Few knew their use and few could repair them. Coated with grime and oxides, deeply pitted, scarred, burnt, they whirled insanely until they broke down and were silent forever or were repaired by someone not yet sunk into complete apathy and forgetfulness. Alone in their majesty, they stood like gods and received homage: offerings of oil laid with tender care before them, polishing by the rhythmically moving hands of hundreds of dull-eyed humans, the adoration of those who came to watch and stood spellbound and helpless before them, eyes clouded by the lightnings, ears deafened by thunder, regarding the machines with supplication once hurled at the sun and moon.

The machines were everything. Their stirrings filled the universe. Payton's universe was the City.



He stopped suddenly in the corridor and nudged Weyman weakly. He pointed to a rivet-studded door.

"Here it is."

He stumbled to the portal and pressed a button. Groaning and whining, the door swung inward and to one side. A blast of air shot out of the opening, nearly knocking him over. He held on to his companion and dragged himself through. The door closed.

A man clad in an oil-streaked and dust-laden tunic came up to him, looming up out of the darkness. He spoke in a high voice. The machines were here. Their voices filled the room.

"Over here!" he shouted into Payton's ear.

He led the two men to a metal slab on which rested three figures, two of men, the other of a woman.

Weyman clutched his arm for support. He turned to his friend.

"They found them this morning."

"Accident?"

"*The Enemy!*"

"How did they die?"

Weyman stood aside and pointed.

It wasn't a pretty sight; these people had died unpleasantly. The woman's body was rigid in death. A bluish foam lay on her lips. Her eyes, wide open, stared at the ceiling. Every muscle was tensed. One of the men exhibited similar symptoms. The other's skull had been crushed in and the blood had coagulated instantly. It lay in cracked lines over the remains of the face. One of the feet was similarly damaged.

Payton shuddered. Icy fear seized him. He spoke without turning.

"No one was near?"

The attendant answered.

"They were alone."

"The ones we find dead are always *alone*," whispered Weyman to the air before him.

Payton seated himself wearily on a metal stool nearby and dismissed the attendant.

"The machinery was damaged. *Chewed*," he said in a slow, strained voice, "chewed ~~as~~ though by teeth."

Weyman shrugged his shoulders.

"There are no such teeth in the City."

"There is *something* in the City."

"Weyman!" Payton clutched the edge of the stool. His thin hands were like the hands of a skeleton. "We must kill them before they kill us all! The council must meet *now*."

## II

Somewhere in the murky distance the deep throat of a gong sounded insistently, rising out of the incessant hum of the machines. Again and again the warning timbre of it beat against the gloom until it seemed to penetrate the fibre and tissues of the defenders. And with that penetration

something long dormant awakened within them, something that was as yet uncertain and questioning. The deep notes meant something, they knew, bore within them some urgent message. Yet, what was it. . . .

In the Synthesis room, where, amidst the litter of laboratory equipment, the defenders peered with tired, dull eyes into microscopes and beakers, half-aimlessly going through the monotonous routine of testing foods, a solitary woman looked up from her work. To her fellow-workers, Martha Fiske was still attractive, according to the degenerated standards of beauty within the fortress. Somewhere, sometime, she had heard that gong before, knew that it carried a message. She leaned against the workbench, gazing listlessly up at the far ceiling, trying to think. What was it? It was so hard to remember, to think of anything now.

"John," she murmured, "I think that means we are supposed to stop."

The man she addressed also looked up. His eyes, she noticed, were not quite as dulled as those of the others; there was still something in them that passed for vitality among the dwellers in the City. Perhaps, Martha thought, she should mate again. There were so few capable women left now, and she knew that, when the time came for the periodic examination, the medical head would most likely recommend that the council assign her another mate. If she acted of her own volition, she might have some choice in the matter. Her thoughts, she noticed, were a little more clear now.

"What is it, John?" she asked.

"I know," he said slowly, the ghost of a smile playing about his wan lips at the thought of rising above the gloom for a moment. "It is a summons to all of us. The council is meeting."

The others had stopped now, were slowly gathering around the two.

"Where does the council meet?" someone wanted to know. That would be Harvey Grant. There hadn't been a full meeting within the span of his eighteen years.

"Everyone make sure you have your side arms ready," commanded Stilson. "Check them now."

As if a solemn ritual were being observed, each member of the party returned to his bench and picked up the small pistol, firing tiny heat-expansion pellets, that was always at the side of every defender, and went through the motions of examining and withdrawing safety-catches. When this was done, they intoned in a low voice, as his eyes met them, "check."

Without a word, John Stilson turned and started toward the farther door. Martha hesitated a second, then walked quickly up beside him.

"Let me walk with you," she said. "I, too, know the way."

In the large room where star shells were assembled, the last defender had murmured "check." Once this work had been done by machinery, but long before, so long that many had forgotten when it had occurred, the mechanisms had broken down and none had known how to repair them. This was a much larger body, situated at the very outskirts of the far-flung City. It was a precautionary measure that these operations took place here, although now had an accident occurred, nothing would have prevented a greater part of the city's being obliterated in a titanic burst of destruction.

The foreman, Crane, nodded and the party began to walk down the endless expanse of ill-lit corridors. They would have to traverse considerable lengths of darkness, and flashbeams were but few. That was why the older men, and the unmated youths, bore small, rapid-firing rifles and formed a solid knot around the couples. The lives of the younger women and healthy males of mating age were far too precious to permit any unnecessary risks—a somewhat mocking thing, now, for the demands of the City, with its unvarying program of production of material needs and production of defense and offense materials made any real semblance of adequate protection of any inhabitant questionable to say the least. But, to their weary thoughts, they were as safe as their resources could make them, and they walked on, in broken ranks, vaguely conscious of the overhanging menace that crept and crept upon them.

"Is it an attack?" asked one of the women, half tremulously.

For a moment or so no one answered.

"Hasn't been an attack that I can remember," volunteered one man, who walked with a limp.

"No," replied an old woman, old by the City's standards, "it isn't an attack. The alarm sounds then. It's a sharp ringing sound that you can never forget. This is something else."

"Do *you* remember an attack?" put in Crane.

"No. My father used to tell me about them many years ago. He heard the alarm once. . . ."

Jensen put down the wrenches slowly and crawled out onto the stone floor. His face bore the helpless look that was continually on the countenances of what few mechanics were left in the City. He wiped the grease on his hands on his trousers mechanically, and turned to his helpers.

"I guess we're wasting our time here," he stated at last. "This thing will never run again."

The others made no comment; no expressions of disappointment or despair lined their faces. This was a matter of course, something to be reported. The rarity was when the mechanic told them that he thought a machine might be made to work again.

Even here, the steady throb of the machines that were running could be heard. That is, it could have been heard by one newly entering the City. The defenders were aware of the incessant vibration only when it was altered by another unit ceasing work.

"What's that gong?" Olney wanted to know.

"Council meeting," quavered old Jep. "Somethin' happening. Ain't an attack because if it was, you'd feel that bell ringin' and a ringin' right through you."

Silently they checked their weapons and prepared to adjourn to the council chambers.

Old Jep's eyes showed that he was worried, as he trailed along behind Jensen and the other. They were coming to one of the dark corridors, where nothing was visible but a faint glow far in the distance which told of lights still in operation.

"Flashes on," spoke Jensen briefly. The three snapped the buttons on their pitifully tiny flashlights, bulbs barely capable of lighting dimly a few feet around them. Yet, to them, this was a good light and they felt a certain security in its pale glow.

At the end of the corridor, they met another, larger party, and the combined forces moved on to other expanses of darkness.

Old Jep's breathing became painfully apparent.

"Wait!" he cried out suddenly. "They's somethin' followin' us!"

At his cry, the entire party halted, as flashbeams were thrown in all directions and guns poised in readiness. Weak eyes strained themselves still further trying to pierce the ink blackness about them.

"Nothing there, pop," said Jensen finally.

"There is! There is!" the old man insisted. "I've *felt* it followin' us, an' now I just seen it. It ain't nothing human; it's a big patch of blackness, but I kin see it movin' behind us—like that critter the old people called a cat."

Startled murmurs resounded from the party at the old man's words, as expressionless faces lit up with fear.

"*There!*" the old man cried, pointing.

Again, the barrage of tiny lights flared.

"There's nothing there, Jep," stated Jensen kindly, but firmly. "Come, we have to move on."

"But I tell you—I seen—" protested the old man, then slumped limply into the arms of Olney. Quickly they laid him on the floor as a doctor examined him.

"Heart," was the laconic diagnosis. "Delirious at the end."

The party moved on.

### III

In the gloomy corridors all leading to a central point they passed other groups moving in the same direction. All displayed the same degree of interested lassitude, all were headed by two or more individuals more awake and alive than the others. Their garb was generally the same, the utilitarian tunic and leather and metal shoes. From their belts hung regulation heat-expansion pistols and the tiny flashlights. More often than not, both were rusted and useless. They had not been replaced for many years as the machines making them had broken down. Only the ammunition supply continued.

The fortress was constructed like a gigantic cylinder, several times as wide as it was high and with the rounded domed top through which protruded the immense cannon which fired endlessly and aimlessly at the world above. The mechanical operation of the City was centered mainly at the flat bottom and occupied several deep levels. The area at the top was designed entirely for the guns. Between were three levels set aside for living quarters, recreation, food supply manufacture and a small part of the atmosphere plant. Here too was a central hall which served as a crude sort of control point, crude because the ancient precision controls were mostly dead. The City itself

was built entirely of steel and heavily insulated within. When the wires rusted and parted they could not be located. Slowly, control broke down and was replaced by an extremely inefficient human relay system operating sporadically and degenerating constantly. The process of relay took up the activities of over two-thirds of the inhabitants of the City, who stood silently at their posts and pressed switches at the command of messengers who dashed from gloomy niche to gloomy niche and level to level in an endless round of activity. Generally the dullest of the brains were assigned to the relays.

The corridors were lined with them, each standing by his post. As the groups passed on and downward, they saluted feebly with a gesture reminiscent of the old military salute. It was not returned.

Accompanying the salute came a feeble cry: "The Chief!" This was answered.

It was the only rallying call left uttered by a human throat.

The Chief was the actual center of authority and power. An old, grizzled man of some sixty years of age, tough, gigantic in stature, thick-skinned and with darting, crafty eyes, he guided the affairs of the fortress according to his own lights. In the dim recesses of his mind which had once been keen and brilliant, he held to certain implanted ideas inherited from his predecessor who had been a man much like himself and had chosen him from among the others. The ideas were sketchy and retained only by the long exercise of discipline. They were also large and simple. Mainly they consisted of the single command spoken constantly in the back of the brain: "Keep the fortress going!" It was not as direct as that, of course, but it was there. The command dominated his every action, colored every thought. The Chief was a machine like the others, bulky, strong, unapproachable. He spoke only to the various section heads, who reported occasionally and generally brought bad news. He accepted it philosophically. He could have done nothing else. His imagination was dead.

At a table at one end of the central room he sat, flanked on both sides by his section heads, among whom were Payton and Weyman. His broad face, creased by innumerable wrinkles, was impassive. He looked neither to the right nor left. The big bland eyes stared through the murky light at the lines of metal stools several yards away. They held about as much expression as did his face.

Payton stirred finally. He had been sitting slumped on his chair—the few chairs left in the fortress were all behind the table, the last remnant of personal privilege—chin resting on the slanted palm of one hand. He raised his eyes and looked in front of him. Peering through the haze, illuminated by several badly blackened light bulbs in the low ceiling, he took in the scene of the chamber slowly filling. In twos and threes they filtered through the large door at the opposite side and seated themselves haphazardly.

He nudged Weyman who sat beside him.

"They're all here. Wake up," for Weyman was slumped wearily in his chair, dozing fitfully, "wake up."

Payton rose from his seat and faced the small throng. Their number was

about two or three hundred, every human being in the fortress who still possessed some flicker of active intelligence. He raised his hand. Instantly the murmurs which had smothered the throbbing of the buried machinery for awhile died. He looked aside at the Chief who also rose and stood beside him. For a few moments the whole mass was silent and motionless. Then the Chief raised his right hand and gave the ancient salute. This was enough. It was the symbol of his authority. Simultaneously he placed his other hand on Payton's shoulder. The transfer of power was complete. Momentary, but effective. All eyes turned on the tall gaunt figure of the nominal head of the atmosphere plant as the Chief resumed his seat and sat back, closing his eyes.

"The Chief has decided to call a meeting of all effectives to consider some means of combating the Enemy," Payton stated flatly. "Three were killed during the last twenty hours. The total number of effectives left is," he glanced down at a sheet of crumpled paper upon which he had been noting the number of arrivals, "two hundred and seventy-eight. This figure is divided almost equally between males and females. Steps must be taken, especially before the balance is further disturbed in favor of the males. Without sufficient females of gestating age the City cannot survive. As it is important first to correlate our forces, the Chief will now hear a report from each of the section heads. The first will be from myself," he paused and held a hand to his head for an instant, then continued tonelessly. "The atmosphere plant is operating at approximately twenty per cent of capacity as calculated according to the specifications of the City when built. The machinery is constantly failing at the rate of one-tenth of one percent every three hundred hours. As the atmosphere plant is the most necessary part of the fortress, it is obvious that at most we have not more than a hundred thousand hours left in which to devise a system of attack and better defense against the Enemy. Weyman, how about power?"

The other rose and faced the audience. His left hand twitched nervously. "The power sources are infinite and the rate of collapse of the machinery is about twice as good as your section, Payton. Reduction of the amount of power generated will better that figure by almost a hundred percent. Any weapon devised to combat the Enemy which is constructed more efficiently than our heaviest cannon must be designed to utilize power at the most economical rate. We have nothing to fear from a power failure at the source. But the converters are limited. We have no experts left to repair them," he finished and sat down.

Payton crooked a finger at a small man at the opposite end of the table, who arose and stood against it, hands pressing, bunched, on its top. "Sellers, what about food?"

The little man's voice was loud, almost electric and staccato.

"Like Weyman's power. Infinite. We cannot of course keep on manufacturing the less important foods. The Enemy has destroyed over half of the remaining machinery which at the time was in excellent condition. As we make our food from gases the rate of degenerating from friction and heavy

wear and tear is very low. The supply can be maintained at the present level until the power fails or the Enemy destroys more equipment. Payton, the question of light is more important than any, it seems to me. We have only a few thousand bulbs left in storage and we cannot manufacture any more. The filament ores cannot be synthesized."

"I know." Payton turned from Sellers and faced the audience. "From this moment on, light must be conserved. On your return switch off all unnecessary bulbs. Is that understood?"

The weary throng nodded a collective head. They stared at him intently, straining all of their feeble resources of energy to catch the import of everything he said.

Payton rested his own hands on the table.

"It is best that you all know that an instrument has been devised by Sellers which may—or may not—detect the Enemy. Its construction will involve the expenditure of several hundred hours' work. All competent mechanics of both sexes will report to him after the conclusion of this meeting. In closing, I remind you that the Enemy is everywhere. They cannot be seen, nor felt—except by those they kill. Reports have reached the Chief that hysteria is breaking out among certain of the more sensitive operators. Resist these impulses of fear. The Enemy can and must be met and conquered. Do not surrender to fantasies. Be aware only of the City and your duties. If any of you are attacked it is the duty of others to report the facts. Try to observe. Strain every sense to detect from what source the attack comes," he paused and again held his temples tightly between the fingers of his hand. He looked up again after a moment, "Remember that we must survive."

They filed out listlessly, leaving the group at the table alone.

Payton turned to Sellers.

"Take us to your section," he said.

Sellers stood on a small metal stool and indicated the blueprints hung on the walls. Payton, Weyman and two other section heads watched the charts closely. The Chief sat in the background in a chair, resting, his eyes closed, the huge frame crumpled and listless.

"The whole point of the matter is that this machine is designed to detect any vibration in the ether from the outermost ranges of the macro waves to the tiniest of the micro. It is also sensitive to the whole band of the spectrum—as far as is known," Sellers stepped down from the stool and regarded the four men with sombre eyes, "the Enemy have thus far shown absolutely no physical indication of their presence save the effects of their attack." He broke off for an instant and pondered, "Since the very earliest days of the fortress we have not ceased ourselves to attack the surface above except on such occasions as scouts were sent out. Who and what the Enemy is has been forgotten. Once, apparently, they could be seen and hurt. Now the Enemy seems to have adopted different methods of attack. *They are here*, within the City—and yet they are nowhere."

"The Enemy is here," repeated Weyman stubbornly. "Our people are dying. They are killed in clearly understood ways—frozen, macerated,

bisected along mathematically straight lines as if by gigantic saws, crushed. Some have even been found with no marks whatsoever of violence evidenced. You mean to imply that the force causing these deaths is not material?"

Sellers glowered.

"I imply nothing of the kind. Aside from the psychic fear induced by the presence of the Enemy at the point of attack—indeed, preceding the attack, we know that in some way they are very material. But how and in what way we do not know. It is a simple law of the ancient science that action begets reaction. The reaction in this case is death, a material fact. The *action* is unknown. Either we are the victims of some colossal *purely psychological* attack or else the laws of nature have altered."

Payton grunted.

"What could remain unchanged in that hell above?"

Weyman impatiently thrust forward.

"Have you the necessary equipment to construct this apparatus?"

"We shall be forced to demolish some of the more delicate inter-level communications machinery. But inasmuch as most of this is not operating anyway, there is small loss. The main thing I have to worry about is the strain on my mechanics. There aren't many left and we are all weak. My original estimate of the time required for its construction is probably understated."

"Well," commented Payton, wearily, "let us lose no further time. You have the necessary equipment and men. Begin building at once."

They finished Seller's machine at the enormous expenditure of six hundred hours of work and the lives of four irreplaceable men who dropped from utter exhaustion at the gruelling labor. Slowly the atmosphere was becoming poisonously tainted. And the lighting system was beginning to break down beyond repair. The City was now illuminated by bulbs lit at emergency spots. Everything else but the control room was in murky darkness.

The first trial was conducted in the control room in the presence of the Chief and the section heads. Several mechanics rolled the heavy detector into position. For once the room was brilliantly illuminated. Under the rays of twenty tremendous lighting units, the group gathered about the intricate construction of tangled wiring and humming motors. Sellers got up in the operator's chair, masked his face with a pair of heavy goggles and turned on the power.

A rising whine began.

The Chief sat up in his chair and stared. His sleepy mind was awake at last. He gripped the arms of his chair tensely.

The whine grew shriller and more penetrating. Sellers reached out a hand and adjusted some small controls. Now a thin aura of electric blue gathered about the machine and its operator and deepened in hue. The motors spun and hummed and spat sparks. The smell of ozone made them cough.

"Sixty decillion per second," Sellers spoke slowly through the lower half of the mask, "nothing on the macro-waves." He depressed his seat and threw



an arm back to shut off a small machine supported by a steel girder. The shrilling whine began to fade. Abruptly it stopped. Another noise began instead, and a steady and deepening beat progressed from a mere tap to what approximated thunder. The aura flashed and crackled. Seller's face became strained and worn. He hunched over the controls and spun them desperately. Now the throbbing was like a continuous earthquake. The metal walls shivered and quaked. Lightning played from floor to ceiling and outlined the scene in a hideous glare.

"Zero to micro!" screamed Sellers above the terrific clangor, "the spectrum is as empty as the ether. There's nothing here but us. . . ."

He glanced suddenly to one side. Abruptly his face became a congealed mass of horror beyond description. His eyes bulged to the bursting point. His fat hands fell to his sides and quivered like lumps of jelly. The others, startled, followed his gaze as the thunder died and the room was immersed in utter silence.

On the floor lay the prone body of the Chief. His head was missing.

#### IV

Payton lifted his hand for silence and the murmurings of the defenders, assembled again in a body, died away.

"In accordance with the often-expressed wishes of the Chief, and with the sealed orders he left to be opened in the event of an emergency resulting in his death or disability, I am taking over the command."

He paused to let the words sink into the consciousness of the assembly, then sheafed through a many-paged document before him.

"This," he continued, "was apparently drawn up many years ago, yet there are matters in it which should be brought to the attention of all of us. I shall read those portions which seem to me to be applicable at the present time."

He cleared his throat, lifted the papers closer to his eyes and read aloud, slowly, "The entire function of the Chief's office has been and must continue to be such as can be outlined in the simple phrase: 'Keep the fortress going.' All other matters must be subordinated to this aim.

"However, there may come a time when the further pursuance of this aim would be sheer folly, when infinitely superior forces opposed to us make further resistance useless.

"In such a case, the only course is to determine if a peace, on terms acceptable to us as human beings, can be made with the Enemy. Ours is a struggle for survival and a possible ultimate victory. What military aims we may have had when the war started cannot now be determined, still a study of such history as is available to us shows that eventually one side in a war must prevail.

"So long as the Fortress can be successfully defended, then so long must our efforts continue unabated. But if at any time it becomes apparent that our maximal achievements are inadequate to the protection of the Fortress and its defenders, then the question of surrender must be considered.

"To my successor, therefore, I submit the proposition that the acceptance

of defeat is more agreeable than total extinction, unless the Enemy's terms are so utterly barbarous and inhuman as to make such extinction preferable."

Payton laid down the paper and rubbed his eyes. "That is all," he said quietly. "Weyman will now give a report upon the situation that confronts us, and we will decide, as soon as possible, on the question of a temporary cessation of hostilities pending an attempt to contact the Enemy and learn his terms."

A deathly silence greeted Weyman as he arose. "There is very little to report except that the total failure of the detector shows that we are completely unable to strike back at the Enemy any longer.

"The Enemy has devised a form of attack which we cannot understand. We know the Enemy has penetrated the Fortress, but we cannot find any trace of him. My opinion is that he is using a weapon operated by remote control; he (or they) is not here physically—I mean," he fumbled a bit searching for words. "I do not think that the Enemy has any *men* inside our City."

He stood for a moment, blinking, as if trying to think of something else to add.

"That is all," he concluded.

One man stood up uncertainly. "Excuse me," he said hesitantly, "but what are we to do, then?"

"Cease hostilities," replied Payton, "send out a party to contact the Enemy, and turn our efforts to reconstructing the Fortress.

"I am ready to listen to any opposing arguments to this course."

Dead silence answered him. Nothing of this sort had occurred in the lifetimes of any of the defenders. The very thought of objecting or opposing any decision or suggestion of the Chief or the council was alien to them.

"If this policy is acceptable, then we shall proceed. The council will reassign all those now engaged in offense activities to reconstruction work."

Payton saluted the assembly as indication that the meeting was over and left the platform slowly. The full implications of the meeting had not struck him, nor had they occurred to the others. They were all too tired, too completely weary to understand what it meant. A few were capable of considering tasks of the next day, or a few days later, as part of the long-term program. These few usually found themselves in executive positions, eventually ending up as council members.

Peace? A truce? Contact the Enemy? The thoughts struck no responding chords in them. No more alertly would they have responded to the announcement that victory had been achieved and the Enemy destroyed. To the executives in the various offense departments, it meant that their departments would be put in order while they waited for further instructions. What would they do in the meantime? Rest perhaps. Or perhaps relieve the understaffed maintenance departments as well as they could.

It did not occur to any of them that the Enemy might continue to decimate them whether they continued the offense or not. Casualties had stopped meaning anything to them. Regularly men and women died, either from

sickness, exhaustion, or in the mysterious, ghastly manner in which their numbers had been decimated in recent years. They were all capable of fear at times, but, so long as they were in the City, it was a temporary, local matter.

Individually, their awareness was too dull to be much afraid of sudden death. Grief and regret for the lost was almost unheard of. The only remnant of emotion that remained to them was sorrow that younger women felt when a mate or child was lost. And even this rarely found expression in weeping or audible exhibitions; the bereaved mother or mate was usually in a state of apathy which left her incapable of work for an indefinite period. Eventually this passed and she went on as before.

As their sorrows were pale, so were their individual joys, if the latter could be applied to them at all. It was noted, however, that among the younger men and women, there was usually a slight increase of efficiency and application for an indefinite period after mating. And a woman whose child was born reasonably healthy usually worked somewhat better than average after the confinement and rest period had passed.

Thus the decision to cease hostilities and attempt making peace with the Enemy aroused no burst of what, in their standards, might have been termed enthusiasm. Peace was a term that bore no meaning to them; was a term that meant little more. There was only the Fortress to be kept going and the Enemy to try to keep off.

Greyness. Greyness and mist and swirling vapours. The thin writhing fingers of mist reaching up to the hidden sky. Nothing moving on the barren plain. Nothing visible in the fog save the looming of giant mushroom-like growths, lifting their umbrellas upward.

Then, a faint, lifting motion. A metal door rising slowly. Again silence. Then a shape gradually rising out of the cavity beneath the door. A shape vaguely human, ponderously lifting itself out of the depths onto the surface. A figure in greyish metal standing upright, alone.

Now other figures, similar in appearance, cautiously emerging from the trap door until the entire party blends against the grey of outside. One stoops and closes the door while another unrolls a large chart, and another studies a compass-like instrument attached to its belt. All are bearing packs on their shoulders. The figure rolls up the chart and places it inside his pack, turns to the others. A brief moment of hesitation, then the party starts moving slowly away toward the shadowy horizon.

John Stilson awoke suddenly, startledly. Where was he? The utter intensity of the blackness around him made his heart hammer in a burst of fear. What had happened? An attack? Had the lights been destroyed?

Someone was calling him. "John," came the voice. "John, it's your watch."

Then he remembered. It was Martha Fiske calling him. They were outside. He rolled over, sat up. Lightly he felt the tap tap tap of rain against his helmet as it trickled down his metal suit. The storm must have nearly abated by now.

"What report, Martha?" he asked.

The complete stillness of outside still bothered him, made it difficult for him to sleep despite weariness. He found himself listening for the familiar throb of machinery and the effort hurt.

"Grant is missing."

That made their losses a total of four. One man vanished, apparently wandering astray in the gloom, the first day. Two more were found *corroded* after a rest period the second. And today, Grant disappeared.

"He was with us when we stopped?"

"Yes."

Stilson had commanded that the party attach themselves together with rope after Prentice had vanished. It made checkups easier, and they would know quickly if anyone got in trouble. Little pits and crevices were common on the surface. A man might easily fall and be lost to sight before the others noticed he was missing. They could not afford to search for the lost ones.

"His rope—?"

"Broken."

"Assign Steevens to the rear guard then. As soon as the ropes are reassembled and everyone checked, report to me. We'll start again as soon as you've had your rest."

"I'm all right, John," she protested. "We can start right away."

"No. You must rest. The others need it, too. How is the weather?"

"Storm ran out about an hour ago."

"Rain stopped? Strange, I can still feel—"

"Those are drops coming from the mushroom."

They slept on the bare earth, their metal suits affording as much protection as was possible to attain on the surface. No comforts but those that they brought with them were to be had. Suits could be discarded for limited periods when sanitary needs required, but helmets must never be doffed. In a way, it was fortunate for them that imagination was a faculty well-nigh lost; could they have realized, even dimly, the utter hostility of outside they never could have endured so much as a single day.

John Stilson took out his precious flashlamp and studied the equally precious chart carefully. He had gone over it painstakingly with Payton—rather, the Chief. It was hard to realize that the strange, seemingly eternal man he and the others had known as the Chief was gone, now, and Payton, whom he and several of the others knew quite well, was now in the supreme position. They had estimated a two-week journey to the Enemy's fortress and had brought along supplies for five weeks. Food concentrates, batteries for their suits, flashlamps, and rope. Compasses and communicators, the latter also run by batteries. Yes, so far as he could make out, they were on the right course. He rolled up the chart and put it away.

"All right?" he asked as he saw Martha again beside him.

"Check."

"Then rest now." He turned to start the round of sleepers.

"John," she called after him.

"What is it?" He came back under the towering mushroom, holding the flashlamp up to her helmet so that he could see her face.

"John—please be careful."

For a moment they gazed into each other's eyes, unspeaking.

"Rest well, Martha," he said simply as he turned away. The moon was sinking out of sight as he patrolled the sleeping figures, peering anxiously into the helmets of each one at regular intervals, checking, checking, checking.

Day after unvarying day punctuated by the black throat of night. Days spent tramping wearily along the fog-shrouded terrain, devoid of anything resembling life save the clusters of mushrooms, and other bits of fungi. And occasionally a pool of foul water surrounded by mold-growths. They came up fragments of metal and stone at times and upon crumbling bones, lost beneath fungus-like growths. The endless plain now and then gave way to slight upcroppings of blasted rock, rock strangely *cleft* as if by strokes of a titan's sword. One or two of the more curious in the party wanted to stop and examine these clefts, but Stilson urged them on. They could not afford to linger.

Onward, endlessly onward. They came to a large expanse of desert dotted with great patches of sheer glass where heat-bombs had fallen and fused the sand in solid masses. One man died here when his helmet burst open as he fell against the unyielding surface and the poisonous atmosphere filled his lungs. The glassy tracts too, were cleft in the same mysterious manner.

Day and night. Night and day. They marched on wordlessly, halting only to rest or to take nourishment, sleeping under the protection of mushrooms, or, if none were available, on the ground or sand itself. And the silent hand of the Enemy touched one here and one there so that they found the grim remains when they arose to go on. It seemed useless to keep watches at night, for never could they see what it was that menaced them, and never were they able to ward it off.

Stilson checked the chart and compass for the fifth time that day and turned to Sellers.

"We should be near, now. We'll try a message."

The older man nodded, understandingly, and withdrew the apparatus from his pack, assembling it quickly. He attached the batteries, then nodded to the leader who picked up the microphone and spoke into it slowly.

"Attention! Attention! We come in peace. We are unarmed and are proceeding to your fortress to make a treaty. Send a party out to guide us. We cannot find your fortress."

He repeated the message several times, then turned the power off. "If we are as near as we think we are, they probably heard us."

It did not occur to him that he could not expect his signals to be picked up in so short a broadcasting period, or that the Enemy might not be able to understand his spoken language. These, and other commonplace pointers had long been lost. The people of the City had long been in a state of thinking to be described only as naive.

They waited for the rest of the day, Stilson repeating his message every few hours. The long night came and passed without new casualties.

"Perhaps," suggested Martha as they started on, "they couldn't find us."

"But they must know where we are," protested Sellers. "We've been attacked constantly."

Further consideration of this point was interrupted by a call, through the party, from Steevens. He'd seen something 'way off to the left, he thought. They started off again in that direction, and, after a few moments, Stilson halted. "It's a dome," he said. "We're here."

## V

He had never seen Martha like this, he thought, never seen her under a real light. Even now, when her brow was wrinkled in a worried expression there was something about her that made his breath catch inside him. He forced these thoughts aside; there were more important things to consider.

"Nothing here, either."

Martha Fiske leaned against a bench. "I can't understand it," she whispered. "First, we find an opening in the dome—unguarded. Then we find an elevator running right down to the inner lock, and that's unguarded, too."

"And now we can't find anyone here."

They stared about them bewilderedly. "They're far superior to us in the upkeep of their fortress. Better light, better atmosphere, more equipment. No wonder they beat us."

"But where are they?"

"They might be having a council meeting," suggested Sellers.

"Even so, we should have set off some alarms. No one could enter our City without setting off a barrage of alarms, and our men would be out with guns ready before they could get to the inner lock."

The party had been exploring the dome city for over an hour. In many ways it was like the Fortress, in other ways different. They continually came upon things they did not recognize, or indications of a city far in advance of theirs. The dome was merely an entrance and the layout of the city seemed to be that of a wheel, with domes, apparently, at various spokes.

"Well," Stilson arose, "we'd better be moving on. I don't see how this place can be deserted. We'll finish exploring this corridor, then decide what to do if we don't find anyone by that time." The light and atmosphere were doing things to him, he realized. Doing things to all of them. They seemed to be beginning to feel alive for the first time in their existences. Several of the men were already complaining of headaches from the light.

Down the long corridor, room after empty room.

"John!" exclaimed Martha suddenly. "If this place is deserted, why can't we take it for ourselves?"

"You mean—move here? All of us? Everyone in the Fortress?"

"Yes."

His hand closed on hers. "Perhaps . . . perhaps . . ."

Steevens called out something and Stilson looked up. "What is it?"

"I found a man. He's asleep, I think."

The words fell upon John Stilson like leaden weights. "Where?" "Over here." They followed him over to the other side of the corridor, stood in the doorway. "There!"

Stilson knelt by the solitary man's side. "I think he's alive," he murmured. Martha smoothed the sleeper's brow, felt the dryness of his skin. At her touch, the man stirred slightly, then his eyes snapped open, stark fear staring out of them. His mouth gaped open; he reached to one side convulsively but his hand fell short. Then, seeing the numbers in the room, he relaxed.

He tried to speak, but only a whisper came forth from his lips. Sellers drew a glass of water from a nearby tap and put it to his mouth. The man drank avidly, then leaned back, breathing heavily, his eyes closed. Finally he opened them again, a resigned expression on his emaciated face.

"You have won," he said simply. "I am the last." He seemed vaguely surprised that they did not fall upon him and rend him on the spot.

Breathing more calmly now, he continued. "Our scientists went mad trying to find a way of counteracting your weapon. They couldn't even find a way of *detecting* your force, let alone combatting it. All we could do was stand by helplessly while one after another of us died and our doctors strove vainly to discover how they died.

"So you are the Enemy. That is strange; you seem human. You are kind to me. We did not think that anyone who could kill and kill as you have done could be anything but monsters. The corroding death and the freezing death, and the silent decapitations—and the destruction of our machines one after another in such a way that they appeared to be *eaten*—well, it is all over now and I am glad.

"Our City is yours for the taking. Farewell." He raised his hand to his head in salute, then closed his eyes. The hand fell limply to his side and his head rolled toward the wall.

For the first time in her life, Martha Fiske wept.

Stilson crouched by the body of Steevens, shook it futilely. It would never respond, he knew; why did he waste his energy?

He shook the next figure. It arose and the voice of Sellers murmured sleepily.

"Sellers," he said desperately. "Sellers, tell me—you must have some idea. What is *it*? What are *they*? *They're* not human, are they?"

The man sat up. "When I was young," he began, "I studied such things as history and biology. There was still a little time for learning then.

"This world—outside—wasn't always as it is now, John. I suppose you realize that, have always realized it more or less. All of us do.

"Once it was clean and beautiful and men lived on it. They didn't have to go underground because they got plenty of light from the Sun—and heat, too. And the atmosphere was clear. You could see the sky most of the time and when night came, you could see the moon clearly. There are other things up there that you could see, too, and it never really got dark.

"Then the wars came and cities above the ground—that's where they used

to have them—were destroyed, and all the—trees?—yes, trees and other growing things were destroyed, too. I think the color of the growing things was green and the sky was blue. But the wars changed all that. Poison gases of all kinds were dumped into the atmosphere and all over the ground. Bombs of all kinds blew the earth into bits and opened big holes in the earth, letting out more gases. Until at last the surface of the earth was just a big cloud of poison gas and fog like you see now."

"But—the Enemy?"

"I was coming to that, John. This is only a theory—a guess on my part, because no one can be sure whether it's right or not. But I think all this made something happen on earth. It brought into being forces which weren't there before. And those forces reacted on each other and produced new forces and those in turn set other things going, until a new form of life appeared. A form particularly adapted for just such conditions as these. To this new form of life, all this is natural and clean and beautiful as the earth we once knew—the one none of us has ever seen, John—was to us.

"I remember a picture in one of the history books. It showed a strange looking thing called—let me think for a moment—called a dinosaur. There aren't any more of them—weren't any even in the old days when men had earth to themselves. Well, men are being wiped out just like the dinosaurs were. I mean, just as surely.

"This new form of life, John, is *the* coming race. It's so superior to us we just can't conceive of it. We can't see it or hear it or smell it or touch it. Or feel it. We just have an idea that it's there. And we know when it kills one of us. But it hasn't come yet. I mean, it's just in its primitive, animal stage now. Some day it'll be big, big as we were in our day."

He sat silently for a moment.

"I wonder if it'll wipe itself out with wars the way we did."

Stilson felt an emptiness inside him. "Sellers, what shall we tell them when we get back?"

"We'll tell them that the Enemy won't make peace. That we've got to keep fighting. Maybe—if I get back—if anyone gets back—it would be a good idea to put something in the water supply so that they all go to sleep painlessly and clean.

"Humanity's done for, John. There's no real sense in fighting or trying to go on. There's nothing here on this earth," and his hand swept over the night before them, "worth our living."

"I don't know," he said slowly. "Perhaps it's worth the trouble, at least, of moving our people to the domed city. At least death won't come in the dark and in poisoned atmosphere. And maybe—there, they can find a way—" His words trailed off because he knew he had no faith in them. What could they do when the far superior dome dwellers had failed utterly?

He snapped on the flashlamp and went on from sleeper to sleeper, shining it in their faces, checking, wondering with a chill in his heart if Martha would awaken when it was time to go on.

The night spread out about him, deep, pitiless. He could sense a deeper blackness within its ebon depths, moving, shifting, moving . . .



# *The Dancer in the Crystal*

*by Francis Flagg*

*It is bad enough to have a fuse in one's home blow out and to stumble about in unfamiliar darkness trying to replace it. The feeling of helplessness that strikes when one tries to switch on electric lights and equipment and obtains no response is one that must have been shared at one time or another by everyone. Now suppose the entire world was short-circuited—every electric channel and source diverted to some unknown wastage; a blown-out fuse in every home, town, industry, railroad, and continent! Such is the stage setting for the opening scene in Francis Flagg's unusual and colorful tale.*

## 1



HEY WHO LIVED during that terrible time will never forget it—twenty-five years ago, when the lights went out.

It was in 1956.

All over the world, in the same hour, and practically at the same minute, electrical machinery ceased to function.

The youth of today can hardly realize what a terrible disaster that was for the people of the middle Twentieth Century. England and America, as well as the major nations of Europe, had just finished electrifying their railroads and scrapping the ponderous steam engines which did duty on some lines up until as late as the summer of 1954. A practical method of harnessing the tides and using their energy to develop electricity, coupled with the building of dams and the generating of cheap power through the labor of rushing rivers and giant waterfalls, and the invention of a device for broadcasting it by wireless as cheaply as it was generated, had hastened this electrification. The perfection of a new vacuum tube by the General Electric Company at Schenectady, in the United States, had made gas economically undesirable. The new method, by which it was possible to relay heat for all purposes at one-third the cost of illuminating gas, swept the various gas companies into oblivion. Even the steamers which plied the seven seas, and the giant planes that soared the air, received the power that turned their propellers, warmed their cabins and cooked their foods, in much the same fashion as did the factories, the railroads, and the private homes and the hotels ashore. Therefore when electricity ceased to

drive the machines, the world stopped. Telegraph, telephone, and wireless communication ceased. Country was cut off from country, city from city, and neighborhood from neighborhood. Automobiles broke down; street-cars and electric trains refused to run; powerhouses were put out of commission; and at night, save for the flickering light of what lanterns, candles, and oil lamps could be resurrected, cities, towns, and hamlets were smothered in darkness.

I have before me the records of that time. It was ten and eleven o'clock in London, Paris, Berlin, and other continental cities when it happened. Restaurants, theaters, hospitals and private homes were plunged into darkness. Mighty thoroughfares that a moment before had glittered and glowed with thousands of lights and wheeling signs became gloomy canyons where people at first paused, questioned, and later plunged through in terrified clamor. Various men who later wrote their impressions for newspapers and magazines say that the thing which shook their nerves the most was the sudden silence which prevailed when all traffic ceased—that, and five minutes later the maddened cries and groans and curses of men and women fighting like wild beasts to escape from crowded restaurants and theaters.

People cursed through the streets shouting to one another that the power-houses had been blown up, that an earthquake had shaken them down. The most absurd statements were made, tossed from mouth to mouth, and added to the general bewilderment and panic. On the street corners religious fanatics suddenly sprang up, proclaiming that the end of the world had come, and that the sinners had better repent of their sins before it was too late. In the hospitals, nurses and doctors found themselves working under a frightful handicap. Gruesome tales are told of doctors caught in the midst of emergency operations. Because of the darkness it was impossible properly to attend the sick. Whenever available, candles, oil lamps and lanterns were pressed into service; but there were pitifully few of these to be had, and nowhere to turn for more. Telephone wires were dead, and automobiles, cars and busses stalled. To add to the horror, fire broke out in various places. There was no way of ringing in an alarm about them, and the fire apparatus could not have responded if there had been. So the fires spread. And the people of those neighborhoods where the flames leapt to heaven, at last had light—the light of their burning homes.

And then in the midst of all this horror and tumult the denizens of the dark, festering spots of the city crept forth. They swarmed from the filthy alleys and from the dives of the professional criminal, furtive-eyed, predatory; and houses were robbed, men killed, and women assaulted. The police were powerless to act; their mobility was gone; burglar alarms did not warn; and the city lay like a giant Samson shorn of its strength.

So that night passed, not for one city alone, but for hundreds of cities!

## 2

While all this was happening in the old world, chaos gripped the new. Across the Atlantic, in the eastern cities of the United States and Canada,

and as far west as Montreal and Chicago, the wheels stopped going at that hour when the workers began to pour forth from the factories and shops, and when the late shopping crowds were thronging the trains and the subways. On the surface cars and on the streets there was, of course, no immediate alarm. Moving-picture and vaudeville houses opened wide their doors, raised the blinds on their windows, and evacuated their patrons in good order. But underground in the various tubes and subways it was a different matter. Hundreds of cars bearing thousands of passengers were stalled in stifling blackness. Guards labored heroically to still the rising hysteria and panic. For perhaps fifteen or twenty minutes—in some cases as long as half an hour—they managed to maintain a species of order. But the great pumps and fans that usually circulated fresh air through the tunnels were no longer functioning. When the foul air fogged the lungs, the passengers went mad. Sobbing and cursing and praying, they fought to escape from the cars, as at the same moment the people of Berlin, Paris and London were fighting to escape from restaurants and theaters. They smashed the windows of the coaches, and in wriggling through them impaled the flesh of their bodies, their hands and faces, on jagged slivers of glass. They trampled each other under foot and flowed in terrified mobs along the right of way, searching madly for exits. In New York alone ten thousand of them perished. They bled to death, were crushed, or died of heart-failure and suffocation.

Above ground, the streets and avenues were thronged with millions of human beings trying to get home on foot. For hours dense crowds of workers, shoppers and businessmen filled the highways and byways. Here again panic was caused by the crashing planes. In Montreal the Royal Dominion air liner, *Edward VII*, on route on a non-stop flight from Halifax to Vancouver with four hundred passengers, fell from a height of three thousand feet onto Windsor Station, killing her own passengers and crew, and blotting out the lives of hundreds of people who were in the station at the time. In New York, Boston and Chicago, where the then new magnetic runabouts were making their initial appearance, hundreds of airplanes plunged to the ground, killing and maiming not only their passengers, but the men, women and children on whom they fell. "It was," states an eye-witness in a book he later wrote, called *The Great Debacle*, "a sight fit to appal the stoutest heart. Subway exits were disgorging ghastly mobs of clawing people; a crashing plane had turned a nearby street into a shambles; crowds ran this way and that, shrieking, praying. Everywhere was panic."

Panic indeed! Yet the records show that what they could do, the police and fire departments did. Mounted policemen were utilized to carry candles and oil lamps to hospitals, to scour the countryside for every available horse, and to ride through the city in an effort to calm the people. Firemen were marched to various points of vantage with axes and chemical containers, to combat any fire that might break out. But in the aggregate these precautions amounted to nothing. Whole hospitals passed the night in darkness; patients died by the hundreds; the flames of myriad

fires lit up the sky; and rumors ran from mouth to mouth adding to the terror and chaos.

America, screamed the mobs, was being attacked by a foreign power. The power-houses had been rendered useless by a powerful magnet. There had been a terrible storm down south; all South America was sinking; North America would go next. No one knew anything; everyone knew something. Nothing was too wild or absurd for millions to believe. Deprived of their accustomed sources of information, the inhabitants became a prey to their own fancies and the disordered fancies of others. Religious fanatics by the light of huge bonfires preached the second coming of Christ and the destruction of the world. Thousands of hysterical people prostrated themselves on the hard street pavements, babbling, weeping, praying. Thousands of others looted wine and strong drinks from the cellars of hotels and cafés and reeled drunken through the streets, adding to the din and the panic. Nor did daylight bring much relief. For some obscure reason, all over Europe, Asia, and America, during the hours of daylight, the sky was strangely dulled. Seemingly the sun shone with all its usual splendor, but the air was perceptibly darkened. Why this should be so not even the scientists could tell. Yet even under the light of what millions of people on earth believed to be their last day, human wolves came out of their dens and prowled through the cities, sacking stores and private homes, blowing open safes, and killing and robbing with impunity. The day that succeeded the night was more horrible than the night that preceded the day, because hundreds of thousands of people who had slept through the hours of darkness awoke and joined their fellows on the streets, and because there is something terrible about a big city in which no cars run and no factory whistles blow, in which the machine has died.

And while the cities and the inhabitants thereof were given over to madness and destruction, tragedy took its toll of the skies and stalked the seas. The aircraft of the world were virtually wiped out. Only those escaped which were at rest in their hangars, or which by some miracle of navigation glided safely to earth. Hardly a year passes now but that on some wild mountain peak, or in a gloomy canyon or the heart of the Sahara, fragments of those airships are found. Nor did ocean-going vessels suffer less. In the space of twenty hours, two thousand ships of all classes and tonnage met with disaster—disaster that ultimately wiped out the great firm of Lloyds, in London, and a host of lesser insurance companies. Fifteen hundred steamers vanished, never to be heard of more, thirty-five of these being giant passenger boats carrying upward of twenty thousand passengers. Of the other five hundred ships, some were dashed to pieces on inhospitable coasts, others drifted ashore and broke up, and the remainder were abandoned at sea. The fate of the missing steamers may be partly inferred from what happened to the *Olympia* and the *Orania*. This is taken from the account of the second officer of the former ship:

"The night was clear and starry, a heavy sea running. We were forging full speed ahead about two hundred miles off the Irish coast. Because of our electrically controlled gyroscope, however, the ship was as steady as a

rock. A dance was being given in both the first and second class ballrooms, the music for them being supplied by the Metropolitan dance orchestra of London. In the third class theater a television moving-picture was being shown. Couples were walking or sitting on the promenade decks as, though a stiff breeze was blowing, the night was warm. From the bridge I could see the *Orania* coming toward us. She made a wonderful sight, her port-holes gleaming tier on tier, and her deck lights glowing and winking, for all the world looking like a giant glowworm or a fabulous trireme. Doubtless, to watchers on her bridge and decks, we presented the same glorious sight, because we were sister ships, belonging to the same line, and of the same build and tonnage. All the time she was coming up I conversed with the first officer on her bridge by means of our wireless phone; and it was while in the midst of this conversation, and while we were still a mile apart and he was preparing (so he said) to have the wheel put over so as to take the *Orania* to starboard of us that, without warning, her lights went out.

"Hardly crediting my eyes, I stared at the spot where a moment before she had been. 'What is the matter with you?' I called through my phone, but there was no answer; and even as I realized that the phone had gone dead, I was overcome with the knowledge that my own ship was plunged in darkness. The decks beneath me were black. I could hear the voices of passengers calling out, some in jest and others in rising alarm, questioning what had happened. 'I can't get the engine room; the ship doesn't answer her helm.' I said, facing the captain, who had clambered to the bridge. 'Quick, Mr. Crowley!' he cried. 'Down with you and turn out the crew. Put men at every cabin door and stairway and keep the passengers off the decks.' His voice thundered into the microphone, which repeated his words through loud-speaking devices in every saloon, cabin, and on every deck of the ship—or should have so repeated them if the instruments had been functioning. 'There is no need for alarm. A little trouble to the engines, and incidentally to the dynamos, has caused the lights to go out. I beg of you to be calm. In a half-hour everything will be fixed.' But even as I rushed to obey his orders, even as his crisp voice rang out on the night-air, I saw the enormous dark bulk bearing down on us, and the heart leapt in my throat. It was the *Orania*, helpless, without guidance, as were we ourselves, rushing ahead under the momentum acquired by her now stilled engines.

"She struck us, bow on, to one side, shearing through steel plates as if they were so much cheese. At that terrific impact, in the dark and the gloom, all order and discipline were swept away. Something had happened to the gyroscopes, and the ships were pitching and tossing, grinding and crashing against each other, our own ship settling by the head, the stern rising.

"Then ensued a terrible time. The night became hideous with the clamor of terrified voices. Maddened passengers fought their ways to the decks, and to the boats. Crowded boats went down into the surging waves bow on or stern first, spilling their human freight into the sea. Hundreds of

passengers, believing that the steamers would at any moment sink, leapt overboard with life-preservers, and in nearly all cases were drowned. All this in the first thirty minutes. After that the panic ebbed; it turned into dull despair. The crews of both steamers, what could be rallied of them, began to control the situation.

"Morning found the *Orania* practically intact, only making water in her No. 1 compartment. The *Olympia* forward compartments were all flooded, taking her down at the head, but the rear eight still held intact, and as long as they did so she could not sink. If the passengers had, from the beginning, remained calm and tractable, hardly a life need have been lost."

The second officer of the *Olympia* goes on to point out that both the giant liners had been thoroughly equipped with the most modern of electro-mechanical devices for use in emergencies; that they carried twin power-receiving engines; that they were electrically steered; and that from the pilot-house and the bridge communication could be had and orders and instructions given, to crew and passengers in every part of the ships. It was, he points out, the sudden and startling going out of the lights, and the totally unexpected breakdown of all machinery, which precipitated the tragedy, and not any negligence on the part of the officers and the crews.

Such is the story of one marine disaster; but the records are full of similar accounts, hundreds of them, which it is needless to set down here.

### 3

On the Pacific coast, especially in the cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco, better order was maintained than in the big cities of the Middle West and the East. Panic there was loss of life and damage to property both from fire and theft, but not on so colossal a scale. This was due to the fact that the authorities had several hours of daylight in which to prepare for darkness, and because in the two cities mentioned there were no subways to speak of. In the downtown districts clerks and businessmen were advised to stick to their offices and stores. Policemen, mounted and afoot, were sent to the residential districts and to the factories. Instead of allowing the workers to scatter, they formed them into groups of twenty, deputized, armed, and as nearly as possible set to patrolling the streets of the neighborhoods in which they lived. These prompt measures did much to avert the worst features of the horrors which swept New York and Chicago and the cities of Europe and Asia. But in spite of them the hospitals knew untold suffering, whole city blocks were destroyed by flames, religious frenzy ran high, and millions of people passed the hours of darkness in fear and trembling.

I was twenty-two at that time, living in Altadena, which is a suburb of Pasadena, about twenty miles from Los Angeles, and trying to write. That morning I had taken a book and a lunch and climbed up the Old Pole Road to the top of Mount Echo, intending to return by the cable car which for years has operated from the purple depths of Rubio Canyon to the towering peak. I reached the top of the mountain after a steep climb, ate my lunch

on the site of the old Lowe Observatory, and then became absorbed in my book.

The first inkling I had that something was wrong was when the light darkened. "It's clouding over," I thought, looking up, but the sky overhead was perfectly clear, the sun particularly bright.

Not a little disturbed in mind, and thinking, I must admit, of earthquakes, I strolled over to where a group of Mexican section workers, under the supervision of a white boss, had been doing some track repairing. The Mexicans were gesticulating and pointing to the cities and the countryside rolling away far beneath us. Now usually on a clear, sunny day there is a haze in the valley and one can not see for very many miles in any direction. But on this day there was an unwonted clarity in the air. Everything on which we gazed was sharply etched—no blurring, no fogging of lines. The houses stood out starkly; so did the spires of churches and the domes of public buildings. Though it was miles away to the westward, the mighty tower of the Los Angeles City Hall could be plainly seen. The light had darkened, yes; but the effect was that of gazing through slightly tinted glasses.

"What do you think it means?" I asked the track boss. But before he could make a reply, a Mexican cried out volubly, pointing one shaking hand up the steep ridge which rose behind us and crossing himself rapidly with the other.

It was an awe-inspiring sight on which we gazed. Over Mount Lowe a luminous, dancing light was growing. I did not know it then, but as far east as Denver and Omaha, and as far south as St. Louis and Galveston, men saw that light. Seen from the western cities of Calgary and Edmonton in Canada it was a pillar of blue flame growing out of the earth and, as the hours passed, mounting higher and higher into the heavens. Millions of eyes from all over the United States and the Dominion fearfully and superstitiously turned toward that glow. As night deepened upon the Pacific coast, the inhabitants of Southern California saw the sky to the north of them cloven asunder by a leaping sword. No wonder millions of people thought that the heavens had opened and Christ was coming.

But before night I had descended the steep slope of Mount Echo and walked the trackway into Altadena. Women and men called to me from doorways and wanted to know if there was a forest fire farther back in the hills. I could give them no answer. On Lake Avenue I saw the automobiles, street-cars, and motor-busses stranded.

"What is the matter?" I asked a conductor.

"I don't know," he said. "There isn't any power. They say all the power plants and machinery have stopped. A man rode through from downtown a few minutes ago and told us so."

I walked on into Pasadena. Everything was tied up. The streets were jammed with cars and people. Owing to the state ordinance which made it a penal offense for planes to fly over any California city—the air routes were so arranged, and the landing-stations and fields outside the cities, access to them being had by fast electric trains—the horror of airships falling on crowded city streets and on residences was entirely averted.

People spoke, however, of having seen a huge air liner and some smaller pleasure planes plunging to earth to the west of them, turning over and over; and afterward I learned that the New York-Los Angeles special, which had just taken the air, had crashed into an orchard with a terrible loss of life.

I went no farther than Madison Street on Colorado Boulevard and turned back. It was ominous to look from the windows and porches of the big house that night and see the city black and formless beneath us. Usually the horizon to the west and south was illuminated for thirty miles around. Now, save for the dull glare of several fires, the darkness was unbroken.

Everything that happened that night is printed indelibly on my memory. Far off, like the sound of surf beating on a rocky shore, we could hear the voice of the mob. It rose and fell, rose and fell. And once we heard the crackle of what we took to be machine-gun fire. In the Flintridge district, I heard later, houses were sacked and looted. Some men defending their homes were murdered and several women badly treated. But in Altadena, up in the foothills, no one suffered any violence. Only once were we alarmed by a procession marching up Lake Avenue, bearing torches and chanting hymns. It was a body of religious fanatics, Holy Rollers, men, women, and children, on their way to Mount Wilson, the better to wait the advent of Jesus. We could hear them shouting and singing, and in the flickering light of the torches, see them frothing at the mouth. They went by, and after that, save for a patrol from the sheriff's office, we saw no one until morning.

Dawn came, but if anything the tension and terror grew greater. All night the threatening scimitar of light over the mountains had grown taller and taller—one could see it literally growing—and the sinister brightness of it radiated like molten steel, nor did the coming of daylight dim its radiance.

None of us had slept during the night; none of us had thought of sleep. Haggard-faced we greeted the dawn, and with despair in our hearts realized that the light of day was perceptibly dimmer than it had been the day before. Could this actually be the end of the world? Were those poor fanatics who had gone by in the night right, and were the heavens opening, as they said? These, and more, were the thoughts that ran through my mind. Then—came the end!

It was 6 p. m. in London, 1 p. m. in New York, and 10 a. m. on the coast when it happened. Millions of people saw the pillar of light waver. For one pregnant moment it grew red-hot, with the crimson redness of heated iron. From its lofty summit, jagged forks of lightning leapt across the heavens and blinded the sight of those that watched. Then it vanished, was gone; and a few minutes after its going the street lights came on, the day brightened, telephone bells rang, wheels turned, and the twenty or so hours of terror and anarchy were ended!

What had been the cause of it all? No one knew. Learned men puzzled their heads over the problem. Scientists were baffled for an adequate answer. Many explanations were advanced, of course, but none of them held water. For a while there was a tendency on the part of various governments to



suspect one another of having invented and utilized a fiendish machine for the undoing of rival nations. However, this suspicion was speedily dropped when it was realized how world-wide had been the nature of the disaster. Dr. LeMont of the Paris Astronomical League advanced the theory that the spots on the sun had something to do with the phenomenon; Doolittle of the Royal Academy of Science in London was of the opinion that the Cosmic Ray discovered by Millikan in 1928 was responsible; while others not so highly placed in the world of science as these two outstanding celebrities suggested anything from a dark comet, a falling meteor, to disturbances in the magnetic centers of the earth. The *Encyclopædia Britannica*, twenty-one years after the disaster which nearly wrecked civilization and perhaps the world, quotes the above theories in detail, and many more besides, but winds up with the assertion that nothing authentic as to the cause of the tragedy of 1956 has ever been forthcoming. This assertion is not true. In the fall of 1963 there was placed before the Royal Academy of Science in Canada evidence as to the origin of the great catastrophe sufficient to call forth an extended investigation on the part of that body.

Though eighteen years have passed since then, the results of that investigation have never been made public. I will not speculate as to the reason for that. In the interim a report was made of the matter to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, to the Royal Academy of Science in London, and to the Paris Astronomical League in France—a report which these learned bodies chose to ignore. And what was the evidence the Royal Academy of Science in Canada investigated?

As I have already stated, I was in California in 1956 and lived through one phase of the great disaster. Three years later—in the summer of 1959—having broken into the pages of some of the better class magazines with my stories, I made a trip to western Canada for the purpose of writing a series of stories for a western journal. It was there, miles from any city and in the foothills of the Rockies, that I met and listened to the story of the dying recluse. He was a young man, I judged, not a whit older than myself, but in the last stages of consumption.

I came upon the ranch-house—a four-room cabin made of split logs and undressed stone—after a hard day's ride. I pitched my tent on the banks of a tumbling mountain stream about a quarter of a mile from the house, and gladly accepted the invitation of the comely young mistress of the place to take dinner with them that evening. She was, I gleaned, the sick man's sister. Her husband, now absent rounding up cattle, was proving up on an adjoining quarter section, having already done so on two others in his wife's and brother-in-law's names.

After dinner I sat on the wide veranda with the sick man, whose sleeping-porch I surmised it was, talking with him and smoking my pipe.

"Visitors are rare out this way," he said, "and an educated man a godsend." I was surprised to find him a man of no little education himself.

"You went to college?" I hazarded.

"Yes, McGill. I took my B. A. And after that, two years of medicine."

Over the plains the sun had sunk in red splendor below the horizon and the

sky was on fire with its reflected glory. Nearer in I saw a ragged black splotch on the billowing earth, burnt-looking, charred.

"A prairie fire," I not so much questioned as stated.

The invalid, propped up on his couch, followed my finger with his cavernous black eyes.

"No," he said. "No. That is where *it*—was."

"It?" I queried.

"Yes," he replied; what the papers called the pillar of fire."

Then I remembered, of course. The burnt splotch was the place where the terrible luminous glow, the cleaving sword I had seen over Mount Lowe, had had its source. I stared, fascinated.

"Nothing," said the man on the couch, "will grow there—since then. The soil has no life in it—no life. It is," he said faintly, "like ashes—black ashes."

Silence fell between us for many minutes. The shadows lengthened and the twilight deepened. It was mournful sitting there in the growing gloom, and I felt relieved when the woman turned on the light in the sitting-room and its cheerful rays flooded through the open windows and the doorway. Finally the invalid said:

"I was here at the time. My sister and her husband were absent on a visit to his folks in Calgary."

"It must have been a stupendous sight," I remarked for want of a better thing to say.

"It was hell," he said. "That's how I got this," tapping himself on the chest and bringing on a fit of coughing. "The air," he gasped; "it was hard on the lungs."

His sister came out and gave him some medicine from a black bottle.

"You mustn't talk so much, Peter; it isn't good for you," she admonished.

He waved an impatient hand, "Let be!" he said. "Let be! What difference does it make? In another day, another week——"

His voice trailed away and then picked up again on a new sentence.

"Oh, don't pity me! Don't waste your pity on the likes of me! If ever a wretch deserved his fate, I deserve mine. Three years now I've suffered the tortures of the damned. Not of flesh alone, but of mind. When I could still walk about, it wasn't so bad; but since I've been chained to this bed I've done nothing but think, think. . . . I think of the great disaster; of the hours of terror and despair known by millions of people. I think of the thousands and thousands of men, women and children trapped in subways and theaters, trampled to death, butchered, murdered. I visualize the hospitals full of the sick and the dying, the giant liners of the air and of the ocean crashing, colliding, going down into the sea; and I seem to hear the screams and the pitiful prayers for help of the maddened passengers. Tell me, what fate should befall the fiend who would loose such woe and misery on an unsuspecting world?"

"There, there," I said soothingly, thinking him delirious, judging his mind unhinged from too much morbid brooding. "It was frightful, of course, but no one could help what happened—no one."

But my words did not calm him. On the contrary they added to his excitement. "That isn't true," he gasped. "It isn't true. No, no, sister, I won't be still, I'm not raving! Give me a drop of brandy—so; and bring me the little cedar box from the cupboard over there."

She complied with his request.

"It's all written down and put away in here," he said, tapping the box. "Put away in here, along with the third crystal which came home in the saddle-bag of John's runaway horse."

His eyes were like two black coals fastened on my face.

"I've told no one," he said tensely "but I can't keep silent any longer. I must speak! I must!"

One of his feverish hands gripped my own. "Don't you understand?" he cried. "I'm the fiend who caused the great world disaster. God help me! I, and one other!"

"No, no," he said, correctly reading the look on my face, "I'm not crazy, I'm not raving. It is God's truth I'm telling you, and the evidence of it is in this cedar box. It began in Montreal when I was going to McGill University. The under-professor of physics there was a young French-Canadian by the name of John Cabot. He——"

A fit of coughing stopped his voice. His sister gave him a sip of water.

"Peter," she pleaded, "let it go for tonight. Tomorrow——"

But he shook his head. "I may be dead tomorrow. Let me talk now." His eyes sought mine. "Did you ever hear about the meteorite that fell back in Manitoba in 1954?"

"No."

"Nor about the seven crystals that were found in it?"

"I don't remember."

"Well, they were found," he said; "seven of them as large as grapefruit. There's nothing remarkable about finding crystals in a meteorite. That has been done before and since. But those seven crystals were not ordinary ones. They were perfectly rounded and polished, as if by hand. Nor was that all: at the core of each of them was a vibrant fluid, and in that fluid was a black spot——"

A spasm of coughing choked his utterance, and this time I joined with his sister in urging him to rest, but desisted when I saw that such advice, and any effort on my part to withdraw, only succeeded in adding to his painful excitement.

"A black spot," he gasped, "that danced and whirled and was never still. Don't try to stop me! I must tell you about it! The scientists of the world were all agog over them. Where, they asked, had the meteor come from, and what were the fluid and the spot at the center of each crystal? In the course of time the crystals were sent various places for observation and study. One went to England, another to France, two to Washington, while the remaining three stayed in Canada, finally coming to rest in the Museum of Natural Science in Montreal which is now under the jurisdiction of McGill University.

"It was during my first year at medical school that I entered the museum

one afternoon, almost by accident. The sight of the crystals, newly exhibited, fascinated me. I could hardly tear myself away in time for a lecture.

"The next afternoon I came again. I watched the black spots dancing in their vibrant fluid. Sometimes they would whirl in the center of the liquid with monotonous regularity. Then suddenly they would dash at the walls which held them in and circle them with inconceivable speed. Was it my imagination, or did the specks take on shape or form? Were they prisoners forever beating their heads against the bars of a cell, seeking to be free? Engrossed in such thoughts I did not know that another had entered the museum until a voice addressed me.

"So you have come under their spell, too, Ross."

"I looked up with a start and recognized John Cabot. We knew each other, of course, because I had studied under him for two years.

"They look so life-like, sir," I replied. "Haven't you noticed it?"

"Perhaps," he said quietly, "they are life."

"The thought stirred my imagination.

"You know," he went on, "that there are scientists who claim life originally came to the earth from some other star, perhaps from outside the universe entirely. Maybe," he said, "it came, even as these crystals came, in a meteor."

The sick man paused and moistened his lips with water.

"That," he said, "was the beginning of the intimacy which sprang up between John Cabot and me. It was often possible for Cabot to take one of the crystals to his room, and then we would foregather there and ponder the mystery of it. Cabot was a sound teacher of physics, but he was more than that. He was a scientist who was also a speculative philosopher, which meant being something of a mystic. Have you ever studied mysticism? No? Then I can't tell you about that. Only from him and his speculations I struck fire. How can I describe it? Perhaps gazing in the crystal hypnotized us both. I don't know as to that. Only night and day both of us became eaten with an overwhelming curiosity.

"What do the scientists say is inside the crystals?" I asked Cabot.

"They don't say," he replied. "They don't know. A message from Mars perhaps, or from beyond the Milky Way."

"From beyond the Milky Way," whispered the sick man. "Can't you see what that would mean to our imaginations?"

He beat the quilt that covered him with his hand.

"It meant," he said, "the forbidden. We dreamed of doing what the scientists of America and Europe said they hesitated to do for fear of the consequences—or for fear of destroying objects valuable to science. We dreamed of breaking the crystal!"

A big moth fluttered into the radius of light and the dying man followed it with his eyes. "That's what we were, Cabot and I, though we didn't know it: moths, trying to reach a searing flame."

By this time I was engrossed in his story. "What then?" I prompted.

"We stole the crystals! Perhaps you read about it at the time?"

I shook my head.

"Well, it was in all the papers."

I explained that in those days I had seldom seen a paper from one week's end to another. He nodded feebly.

"That accounts for it, then. The theft caused a sensation in university circles, and both Cabot and I were thoroughly questioned and searched. But we had been too clever!" The sick man laughed mirthlessly. "God help us! too clever! What wouldn't I give now," cried Peter Ross bitterly, "if we had been discovered! But a malignant fate ordered otherwise. We were successful. During the holidays I took the crystal home with me, home, to these hills and plains. Later Cabot joined me."

He broke off for a moment as if exhausted.

"I wonder," he said, after a few minutes, "if I can make what we felt and thought clear to you. It wasn't just idle curiosity that was driving us. No! It was more than that. Out of the unknown itself had come a meteor with a message for mankind. Something stupendous was hidden in the cores of those crystals. Yet what had the scientists of the world done? They had contented themselves with weighing the crystals, looking at them under a microscope, photographing them, writing learned articles about them, and then putting them away on museum shelves! None of them—not one; or so it seemed to us—had had the courage to open a crystal. Their reasons—deadly germs, virulent forms of life, terrific explosions—we dismissed as cowardly vaporings. The time had come, we said, to investigate more thoroughly. God help us," whispered Peter Ross, "we blinded ourselves to what might be the consequences of our rash experiment! We eased our consciences with the reflection that we were safeguarding humanity from any danger by carrying it out in the wilderness, miles from any city or human habitation. If there were to be any martyrs, we thought egotistically, it would be us alone. We had, of course, no inkling of the terrible force we were about to loose.

"Early in the morning of the day of the disaster we rode from this place down there to the plains, down to where you saw that charred splotch. We had with us a portable outfit of chemical instruments. It was our intention to smash one of the crystals, catch the fluid in our test-tubes, isolate the black spot, and make an analysis of it and the liquid later. But we never did," he said; "we never did."

A cough rattled in his throat.

"It was Cabot who broke the crystal. Before noon, it was, but I'm not sure of the time. He knew how to do it; he had all the tools necessary. The crystal lay inside a metal container. I tell you there was something uncanny about it glimmering in the sun! The black spot was whirling madly, dashing itself with violence against the restraining walls as if it sensed that freedom was near.

"Look at him," said Cabot tensely. "Look at him leaping and kicking. What a dancer! What a—in a minute now and he'll be out of that!"

"Perhaps it was the phrase; perhaps it was the masculine pronoun used in connection with the black spot; but suddenly I was afraid of the thing we would do. Fearful possibilities ran through my mind.

" 'John,' I cried, stepping back several paces, 'John, don't!'

"But Cabot never heard me. His hand went up with the heavy hammer.

"Poor John! Nothing warned him—nothing stayed him!

"The blow came down. I heard the tinkling crash; then——

" 'Oh my God!'

"It was Cabot's voice in a shrill scream of unutterable horror and agony. His bent figure straightened up, and from his hair and his outflung arms blue lights crackled and streamed, and all around his body a column of something shimmered and shifted and grew. So for a moment he postured; then he began to dance. I tell you he began to dance, not by any force or power that resided in his own limbs, but as if he were jerked or writhed about by an external agent. I saw what that agent was. It was the black spot! Out of the ground it rose like an evil jinnée and took on the form and shape of something monstrous, inhuman, horrible. It leapt and whirled; and yes, though I couldn't hear it, it sang and shouted. It was the nucleus of an increasing body of light. I felt searing heat scorch my cheeks and burn my throat with every breath I drew. More! I felt that streaming fingers of light were reaching out at me, clutching.

"With a sob of fear I turned and ran. Cabot's horse had broken loose and was running wildly across the plains. My own was plunging madly at the end of its picket rope. Somehow I mounted and fled, but after several miles of such flight my horse put its hoof in a prairie-dog hole and broke its leg, pitching me over its head.

"How long I lay dead to the world I don't know; but the long shadows were running eastward when I came to. The air was acrid and bitter. With fearful eyes I saw that the day was unaccountably dark and that the pillar of fire out on the plains had grown to immense proportions. Even as I gazed on it, it grew. Hour after hour it grew, adding to its circumference and height. From the four corners of the horizon, in mighty arches that dipped to a common center, flowed infinitesimal particles of what seemed golden dust. I know now that all the electricity was being sucked out of the air, darkening the day, blackening the night, and rendering all machinery useless. But then I knew only that the pillar of fire, the center to which those particles cohered, was drawing nearer and nearer to where I lay. For I could barely move, my feet seemed like lead, and there was a tight band round my chest.

"Perhaps I was delirious, out of my head; I do not know, but I got on my feet and walked and walked, and when I couldn't walk I crawled. Hours and hours I crawled, driven ahead by a growing horror of the nightmare that pursued me; yet when I stopped, exhausted, I was still far away from the foothills and the pillar of fire was nearer than ever. I could see the monstrous black thing inside of it dancing and whirling. My God! It was reaching out dark streamers of fire after me; it was calling out that it wanted me, that it would have me, that nothing this side of heaven or hell could keep it from me; and as it shot this implacable message into my senses, it grew bigger, it danced faster, and it came closer.

"Again I staggered to my feet and ran. Late night found me several

miles below here, quenching my thirst at a spring of water which trickles from the side of a rock. I looked back, and the pillar of fire was now so high that it lost itself in the heavens. All around me played a livid light, a light that flung the shape of a gigantic dancing horror this way and that. Did I tell you that this light was like a pillar? Yes, it was like a pillar whose middle swelled out in a great arc; and I knew that I was doomed, that I could not escape, and swooning horror overcame me and I fell to the ground and buried my face in my hands.

"Hours passed—or was it only minutes? I cannot say. I could feel my body writhing, twisting. Every atom of my flesh was vibrating to an unnatural rhythm. I was crazy, yes, out of my head, delirious, but I swear to you that I heard John Cabot crying to me, imploring, 'For God's sake, break the crystal, break the crystal!' and I cried back into my huddled arms not speaking, yet screaming it, 'We broke the crystal! God help us! We broke the crystal!'

"Then suddenly it came to me that he meant the second crystal. Yes, yes, I understood. The fiendish thing out there on the plain was seeking, not me but its counterpart.

"The second crystal was in the knapsack still swung on my back. With insane fury I tore it out of its padded, protected housing and whirled it over my head. Filled with loathing of the terrible thing, I flung it from me as far as the strength of my arm would permit. Perhaps twenty yards away it crashed into a rock and was shattered to pieces. I saw the slivers of it glint and flash; then from the spot where it struck rose a column of light, and in the column of light was a whirling speck. Like its predecessor it grew and grew, and as it grew, receded from me in the direction of the mightier pillar whirling and calling. How can I tell you of the weird dance of the evil ones? They sang to each other, and I know the song they sang, but I cannot tell it to you because it was not sung in words.

"At what hour they came together, whether it was day or night, I do not know. Only I saw them merge. With their coming together the terrible power that was sucking in the world's electrical forces to one gigantic center became neutralized. The heavens split open as the bolts of lightning devastated the sky. Through the rent firmament I saw a black shape cleave its way. Whatever had been in the two crystals was leaving the earth, was plunging through the Milky Way, through the incalculable spaces beyond the reach of our most powerful telescopes, back back. . . "

Two days later, in a grave beside the tumbling mountain stream, his brother-in-law and I buried all that was mortal of Peter Ross. Over his resting-place we piled a great cairn of rocks so that the spring floods might not wash his body away nor coyotes worry the tomb of the dead. When I parted with the bereaved sister, she pressed me to accept the cedar box.

"Poor Peter!" she said. "Toward the last he ran a fever all the time and was delirious; but he wanted you to have the box, and so you must take it." I saw that she attached no importance to his story.

"He never mentioned it before," she said; "he was out of his head."

And so I was inclined to believe until I examined the contents of the box. Then I changed my mind. If what he told us had been naught but the result of morbid brooding and delirium, then he must have been morbid and delirious for years preceding his death, because the written version of his story began simply, "It is nearly a year now since," and was a bare recital of facts, written plainly and in the manner of a man with no especial gift for expressing himself in words. Nor was that all. Besides the manuscript mentioned were revealed various letters which I perused, letters from Cabot to Ross, Ross to Cabot, covering a period of years and telling of their ideas and plans and of the theft of the crystals. The whole story, save for its denouement, could be pieced together from those letters.

Incredible as Peter Ross's tale had sounded in the telling, wild and incoherent though it had been, and colored with fever and delirium none the less it was true. And as if to rout whatever disbelief might be still lurking in my mind, I saw that which finally led me to place the whole matter before the Royal Academy of Science in Canada, and before various other scientific bodies, as I have recorded; and which in this latter day, so that mankind may be warned against the menace imprisoned in the crystals, has made me put everything down here: the crowning evidence of all. For in the bottom of the box was a round object; and when I picked it up, my fascinated eyes were held by a transparent bubble the size of an orange with a black spot at its core, dancing, dancing. . . .

## THE END



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